H5 The Marshall Cavendish Learning System: History

THE RISE OF ISLAM





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Introduction

by Alan Bullock

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FROM THE earliest recorded time, the history of the Middle East - the meeting place of three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa - has been dominated by the clash of rival empires and rival faiths. Each of the chapters in this book represents one of the many episodes or themes in this long history of insecurity, violence - and creativity.

The first chapter illustrates very well how these different elements are combined. The rise of Islam is a history of successful campaigns, in which within a hundred years of the prophet Mohammed's death (632 AD), his followers had brought a huge tract of territory stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic under their dominion. This was a remarkable achievement, by any standards, but nothing can disguise the fact that it is an almost unrelieved record of bloodshed, brutality, treachery and assassination. Yet it is equally true that on this basis was erected one of the most distinctive and lasting of human civilizations. The Moslem world still means something in the second half of the twentieth century and if we want to understand either its geography or its beliefs, we have to go back to the Prophet and the seventh century conquests of his followers.

Nor has Muslim influence been confined to the Middle East. Chapter four recalls one of the most graceful and attractive stories in European history, the Moorish kingdoms of Spain, a civilization without equal in the Europe of their time. The Christian conquest of these Moorish kingdoms is a black page in European history, and much the same may be said of the Crusades (chapter two), a story of brutality and bloodshed which this time left very little behind to commend it.

Another of the great civilizations of the Middle East is the subject of chapter three, Byzantium, a name which still has a magi-

cal ring in my ears. The sack of Byzantium by the Fourth Crusäde in 1204 is a shameful act in the history of Christendom and the once powerful empire hardly recovered before its final end in 1453. The Ottoman Turks who were its successors carried their power deep into Europe and besieged Vienna itself in 1529 and again in 1683, but in culture and civilization they never approached the great days of Byzantium. Theirs was a barren rule which left little legacy other than the arrested development of the peoples who lived under their dominion.

This cannot be said of the last of the civilizations to be described in this book, that of Persia. Chapter six describes the epoch of the Safavid Shahs in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when Isfahan became the capital of an empire which made a deep impression on many European travellers to the East and which, like its great rival, the Ottoman, was an heir of Moslem civilization although of a different dispensation (the Shi'ite) from the orthodox Sunni faith of the Ottoman Sultans.

The final chapter plunges abruptly into the crisis of adaptation to the modern world which has crippled the Middle East in the present century. The Moslem country which has made the transition with most success is Turkey and this largely thanks to the genius of a single man, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) who wrenched his fellow countrymen out of their traditional ways and broke decisively with the past. It is a striking conclusion to the whole book which began with the formation of Islam by Mohammed in the seventh century and ends fittingly with its secularization by Atatürk in the twentieth.

Holy wars of Islam

The Prophet Mohammed inspired his armies of followers to sweep across Egypt, Persia, across North Africa and the shores of the Mediterranean to found a huge empire, united by a common belief.

AT DEAD OF NIGHT in the summer of 622 A D soldiers burst into the house of Mohammed. They were sent by the rulers of Mecca to arrest him as an enemy of the people and a danger to the security of the city, trading centre of the Quraysh clansmen of Arabia. Pulling Mohammed's relations and servants from their beds, the soldiers thrust torches into their faces, peering from one silhouetted figure to another to find the man who called himself the Prophet of God, and who secretly conspired with the enemies of the Quraysh in the rival trading city of Yathrib (now Medina). In the confusion, Mohammed, accompanied by Abu Bakr, his disciple and fellow merchant, slipped away into the night, fleeing to the desert hills where they hid in a cave.

Messenger of God

By morning the Quraysh had posted notices putting the price of 100 camels on Mohammed's head and many of his former neighbours sought to earn the reward. One band of pursuers actually peered into the cave where the fugitives hid, without seeing them. Mohammed's supporters made secret trips from Mecca to bring the fugitives food and fast camels, and after several days' journey they came within sight of Yathrib, 200 miles to the north. To the people of Yathrib, Mohammed was no traitor, but the messenger of God. They welcomed him to their city and he entered in triumph with an escort of 70 soldiers. The flight to Medina, called the *Hegira*, 'the breaking of bonds', was so important to Moslems – those who 'submitted to God' – that they dated the beginning of their era from the event.

During the next ten years most of the Medinans adopted the new faith, but Mohammed's success brought him little peace. Practically the whole of this period was spent in bitter, merciless warfare, often against the Quraysh. The character of inter-tribal warfare in Arabia at that time may be judged from a passage in the Koran, the Holy Book which Moslems claim to be the words of God revealed to Mohammed and committed to writing after his death: 'The Messenger of God may take no captives until there has been slaughter in the land.' An example of this philosophy in practice occurred when Mohammed was faced with the problem of what to do with the Bani Quraiza, a



Moslems believed they had divine support in battle. The Angel Gabriel encourages Mohammed during the siege of Bam Nadir.

Jewish tribe allied to the Moslems, who were discovered to be secretly negotiating with the Quraysh. When the Bani Quraiza had been taken prisoner, Mohammed, undecided what to do with them, passed the task of judgment to the chief of another allied Jewish tribe, a man who under stress of wounds in battle had become a fanatical Moslem. This chief decreed: 'I condemn the men to death, their property should be divided among the victors, their women and children should become slaves.' On the following morning the sentence was carried out exactly as decreed. Thus the early days of Islam were bathed in blood.

By 632, when Mohammed died, most of Arabia had fallen to Islam. At his death the gentle, faithful, and prematurely old Abu Bakr, was appointed *caliph* (successor). Unaffected in character by his elevation to what was virtually a kingship, Abu Bakr continued to sell his cloth in the market place. Meanwhile, his commanders, with his blessing, embarked on a *jihad* (holy war) against Syria, then a province of the Byzantine Empire. In a terrific burst of energy, the Moslem armies cut clean through the enfeebled Byzantine and Persian Empires. Syria fell by 635, Palestine and Mesopotamia by 640, Egypt by 642, Persia by 643, Tripolitania by 647, and Cyprus by 649. Abu Bakr had died after reigning only two years, and this vast empire was won under the leadership of the peppery-tempered Omar (reigned 634–

644) and the aged, incompetent Othman (reigned 644–656). Both these men, the second and third caliphs, were assassinated.

Reign of warfare

Reluctantly, fearful that he might suffer the same fate, Ali, son of Abu Bakr and son-in-law of Mohammed, became the fourth caliph (reigned 656–661), elected, like his predecessors, in Medina. Ali's reign was haunted by the ghost of Othman, whose bloodstained shirt, clasped by the hacked-off fingers of his wife, hung in a place of honour in the mosque at Damascus, reminding the faithful of a barbarous murder. Although Ali had tried to prevent Othman's murder, the fact that he had accepted the caliphate with the support of the assassins made him suspect, and many Moslems took up arms against him, including Ayesha, whose considerable influence in Moslem affairs derived from the fact that she was the widow of Mohammed. In 656, the forces of Ali and Ayesha clashed at Basra. Ayesha led her forces



At Badr in 624, Mohammed and his followers fought and defeated the Quraysh. An armistice secured Mohammed's return to Mecca in 630.



Mohammed, on the left, gives the two-pointed Sword of Islam to Ali, his son-in-law. Ali ruled from 656 until his murder in 661.

into a ferocious fight that ended only when she was taken prisoner on a battlefield strewn with 13,000 corpses. Ali, always merciful, sent her back to Medina, where, under guard, she could meddle no more in his affairs. But beyond Ayesha lay other enemies, and Ali spent his entire five years' reign in warfare. In 661 he too fell to an assassin's blade. Typically, before he died, painfully gasping out the last hours of his short, tragic reign, this merciful and self-denying man forbade the torture of his murderer.

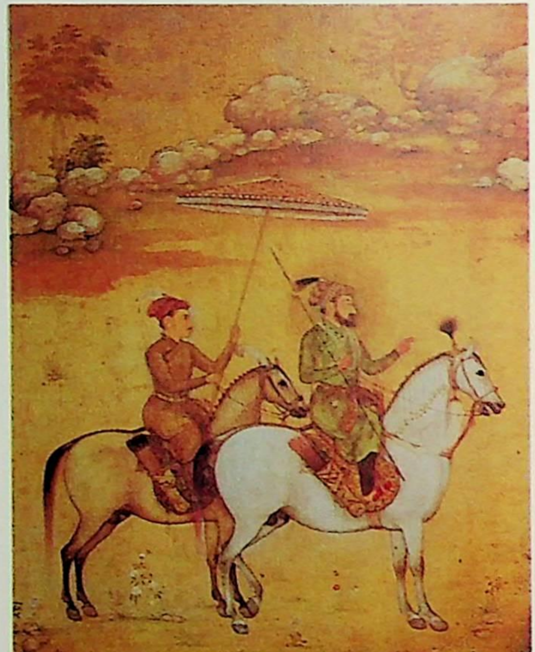
Ali proved more powerful in death than in life; more influential as a martyr than as a conqueror. In him the Persians found a posthumous saviour, a champion against their Arab co-religionists. By 679 the mainly Persian *Shi'ite* sects ('partisans' of Ali) were divided from the majority Sunnite sects, followers of the *Sunni* (traditional record of the sayings and doings of Mohammed) by a basic schism.

Following the death of Ali and the bitter disputes that arose from the event, power passed to the Umayyad family. Ali's enemy, Muawiya, who at 60 was still young enough to have once acted as clerk to Mohammed, became the fifth caliph, setting up his capital in the fertile, gay trading city of Damascus.

The pleasant climate and Byzantine culture of Damascus began to mellow the flinty, desert-born character of Islam. The easy-going Muawiya married a Christian, appointed infidels to posts of high responsibility and gave honours to poets, a class of people banned and detested by Mohammed. He turned desert-dwellers into sailors, building ships and sending the faithful to make naval war against Byzantium itself. The Umayyad dynasty ruled from Damascus for nearly a century. They built grand, decorated mosques like the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Great Mosque of Damascus and lived almost as grandly as the Byzantine emperors. The Umayyads advanced their territories beyond Bukkara and Kabul in the east, consolidated their grip on northern Africa, took Spain, and advanced across the Pyrenees into France.

In 732, a hundred years after Mohammed's death, an Arab army pushing northward through France was halted by the Franks, with whom it fought an indecisive battle between Poitiers and Tours. Unnerved by this first check to their power, the Arabs wavered. They were ill-dressed to face the icy-cold weather, the terrain was unsuited to their usual methods of fighting, they believed themselves to be outnumbered and – worst of all – they had quarrelled among themselves over the booty they had captured. Abandoning town after town, the Moslems withdrew from France. Following this first check to Moslem power the Umayyad dynasty

Shah Jehan, ruler of the Kara-Kyunlu Turkomans who took over most of western and southern Iran, rides with his son, Kara Shukoh.



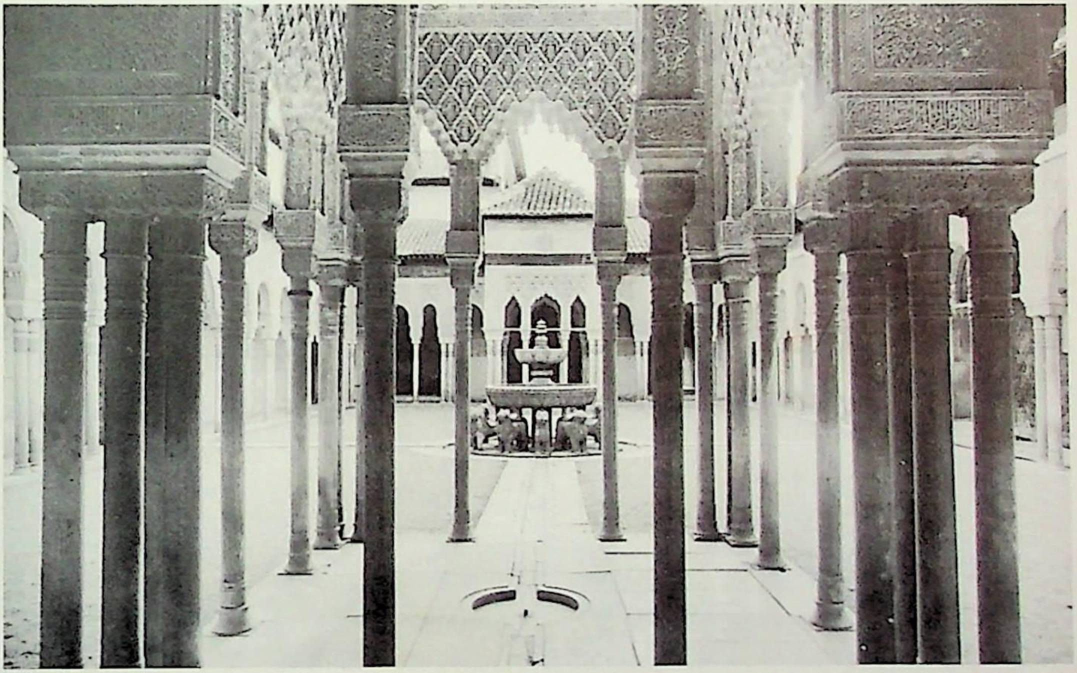
began to totter: Africa, Persia, and Central Asia rose in perpetual revolt. When the horse-racing caliph Hisham died, to be succeeded by the proud, profligate and atheistic Walid, the doom of the Umayyads was set. Revolt after revolt broke out. After Walid was assassinated in 744, the Umayyad Empire experienced another six years of anarchy.

Terrible vengeance

The murder of Ali had cast a shadow over the whole period of Umayyad rule, and it was to prove the final undoing. In 747, Abu Muslim, a Persian slave once bought in the market at Mecca by the head of the Quraysh clan, raised a revolt to destroy the Umayyads and replace them by the Abbasids, a family descended from Mohammed's uncle Al-Abbas. In 750 the armies of the two rival families clashed near the Tigris river in northern Iraq. The Abbasids flew black banners and (although not Shi'ite) draped their soldiers, horses and camels in black as a symbol of mourning for the martyrdom of Ali and of his many descendants killed by the Umayyads. After nine days the Umayyads broke ranks and fled; shortly afterwards Damascus itself fell.

The Abbasids wreaked a terrible vengeance for Ali. By a trick they murdered almost the entire Umayyad family; they dug up the rotting bodies of the dead caliphs, thrashed them, and flung their remnants on to fires. From 750 to 1258, the main leadership of Islam passed to the Abbasid dynasty. Its main capital was Baghdad, and its culture predominantly Persian. Only Spain was left to the Umayyads, and in 756 they established an independent emirate with Cordoba as the

After the Umayyad dynasty fell, minor dynasties and the Berbers ruled Spain until the Nasrids (1232–1492) unified the country. At Granada they built the Alhambra Palace where the Court of the Lions was reserved for the king's harem.

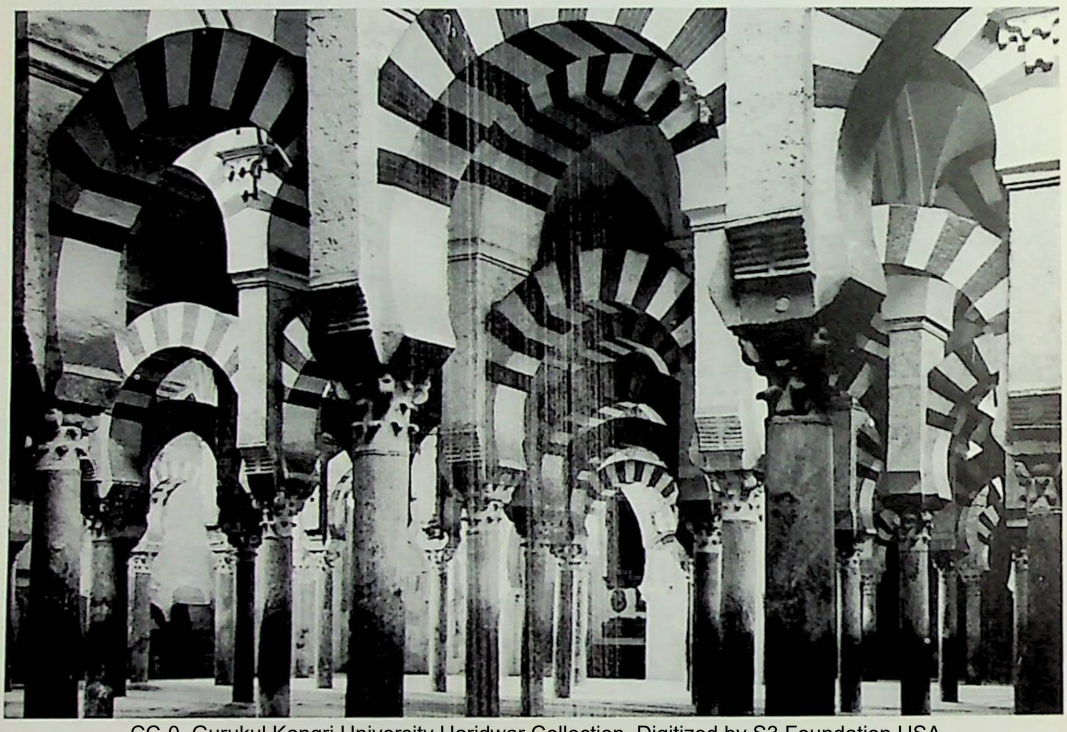


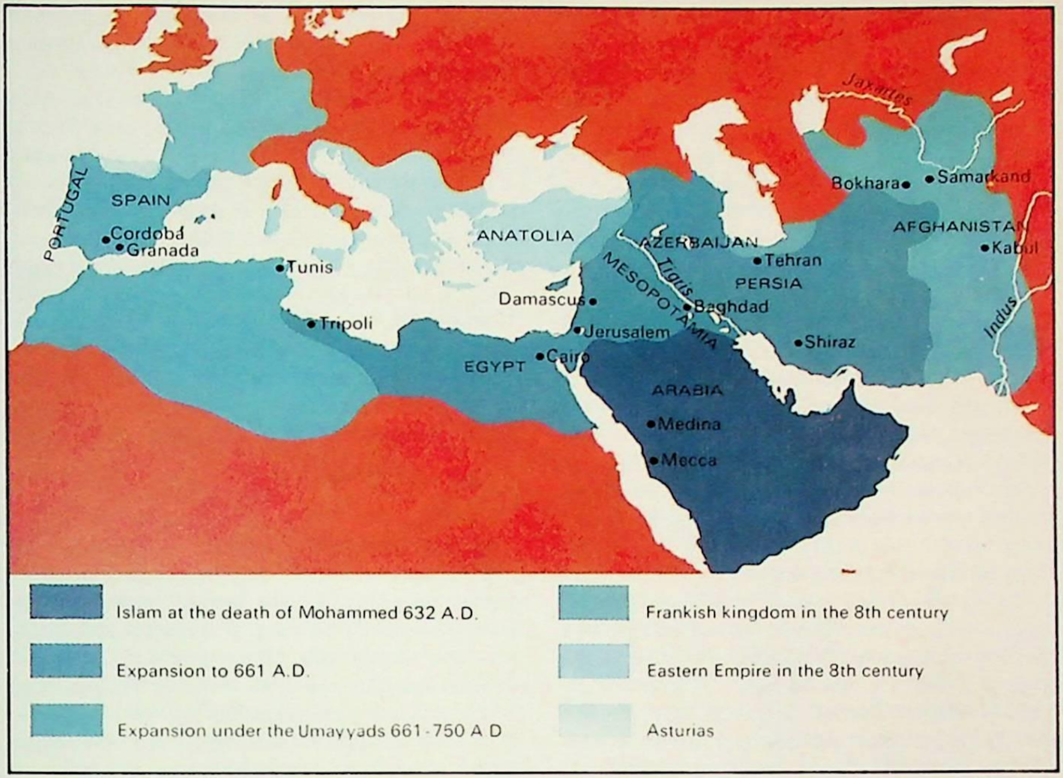
capital of its thriving civilization. Baghdad quickly developed into a centre of great culture, its wine-bibing caliphs permitting a degree of gaiety that would have outraged the stern piety of the early Arabian Moslems. Great literature and art stemmed from Baghdad, and the painting of living creatures – abhorred by Mohammed – was practised freely. The Golden Age of Baghdad (762–1055) is symbolized by the colourful reign of Harun al-Rashid (reigned 786–809) – the Caliph of the *Arabian Nights*.

Very little expansion of Islam occurred under the Abbasids, and they could not prevent the disintegration of the Islamic world into rival caliphates. After the reign of Harun al-Rashid, the Baghdad caliphs lost much of their power, and local rulers became quasi-independent, issuing coins in their own right. Spain was Umayyad, and Morocco fell to Idris Ibn-Abdallah, a grandson of Ali, who founded the Idrisid dynasty. Egypt broke away in 970 to become an independent caliphate with its capital at Cairo, under the Fatimids – a family that claimed direct descent from Fatima, the daughter of Mohammed. The Fatimids established a flourishing culture that in many ways rivalled that of the Abbasids.

The province of Khorasan, with its centre in present-day Afghanistan, ruled in 1000 by Mahmud of Ghazni (the capital city about 100 miles south of Kabul) became a powerful state in its own right. Mahmud's territory lay at the eastern outpost of the Abbasid Empire at a time

Abd al-Rahman I founded the great mosque of Cordoba in 785. During the 300-year rule of the Umayyads, Spain and Cordoba became a centre of the Moslem world, rivalling Baghdad.





The map shows that Islam extended into Persia, across southern Europe and northern Africa.

when the great westward movement of the Mongol-Tartar peoples was under way. One branch of these peoples, the Turks, were absorbed by Khorasan. Turk soldiers fought Mahmud's wars and Turk governors ruled the districts of his domains. Mahmud came to dominate the Abbasid Empire and his soldiers beat off later waves of Turks from the east. The enfeebled Baghdad caliphate effectively held only a wedge of territory along the Tigris and Euphrates north of Baghdad, to the Persian Gulf south of Shiraz. The vast territory under Mahmud's suzerainty stretched from the Caspian Sea to the Ganges.

After Mahmud's time, the Seljuks, another wave of Turks, led by Toghrul Beg, overran Khorasan and in 1055 seized Baghdad. Toghrul Beg allowed the weak Abbasid caliph to remain in Baghdad, but assumed the office of *sultan* (sovereign). The Seljuks, becoming Moslems, went on to seize Jerusalem, and clashed with the Christian Crusaders. Yet another wave of Turks, the Osmanli or Ottoman (followers of Osman), came westward. In the fourteenth century they seized Anatolia from the Seljuks and set up the Ottoman dynasty, which lasted until 1922.

Mongol-Tartar invasions

Meanwhile, Mongol-Tartar invasions continued and gathered pace. In 1258 the armies of Hulagu, grandson of Genghiz Khan, turned their flame-throwers on Baghdad, then a city of perhaps two mil-

lion inhabitants. The caliph was beaten to death, and dreadful days of rape, pillage and destruction followed. The stench from a million decaying corpses drove the invaders away in fear of the plague that they had brought about. Thus, after 500 years, the Abbasid caliphate disappeared. Nothing, it seemed, could stem the Mongol-Tartar tide; it threatened to sweep away not only Islam, but Christendom too.

Egypt too, was threatened, but its rulers were of sterner stuff than the Abbasids. They were Turk and Circassian slaves who had seized control of Egypt in 1250 and established the Mamluk (slave) dynasty, which lasted until 1517. The Mamluk armies met the dreaded Tartars near Jerusalem in 1260 and gave them their first, and decisive defeat. In so doing they saved Islam and possibly Christendom in three continents.

But the Mongol power was by no means exhausted; rather it was diverted. In the fourteenth century a mighty new conqueror, Timur the Lame (Tamerlane), took northern India, Afghanistan, Persia and Syria, and for a time held Moscow and Delhi. Timur's power was virtually unchecked, and those who resisted him met grim fates. Yet Timur was no savage,

In 1258 the invading Mongol armies of Hulagu, the grandson of Genghiz Khan, sacked Baghdad and threatened to sweep away Islam. Hulagu is entertained by his brother, Mangu.



but a patron of the arts and a devout Moslem. His capital at Samarkand was a bustling centre of trade and culture.

While Islam expanded in Central Asia it withered away in Spain, and was finally expelled in 1492. In 1526, while the Moslem Turk armies of Sultan Suliman the Magnificent defeated the Hungarians in Central Europe and stood ready to march on Vienna, the Mongols struck at India. Baber, a Moslem descended from both Genghiz Khan and Timur, took Delhi and founded the Mughal Empire. Thus the formidable Mongol-Tartar-Turkish hordes spread the faith not only in India, but in south-eastern Europe, Russia, and China.

Islam in Asia

The Moslems had begun as peoples of the desert, but within half a century of Mohammed's death they emerged as competent sailors. By the tenth century, they were regularly sailing the sea routes eastward to Indonesia. During the time of the T'ang dynasty (ended 907), Persian and Arab ships regularly traded with China; they even sacked Canton. By the thirteenth century, tiny Moslem states had been established in Sumatra. From Sumatra, Islam spread peacefully through Malacca to Java, and thence to most of Indonesia. From the eighth century onwards, Arab influence began to creep southwards along the coasts of Africa and beyond the Sahara.

But by 1600 the great days of the Moslems were already over in both the political and cultural fields. By 1900, outside China and the decaying Turkish Empire, almost all Moslems were under British, French or Dutch (and therefore Christian) rule. Yet the Islamic religion continues to expand, particularly now in Africa. Like Christianity its fanatical days are over, but it is still the faith of more than 400 million people in the warm belt of land between Mauritania, on the western edge of the Sahara, and Indonesia.

Crusaders to the Holy Land

Fighting to keep the Holy Places open for pilgrims, the crusaders achieved little of lasting religious value. But they were instrumental in developing trade and spreading Arab culture in the West.

THE BURNING SUN of Syria had not yet reached its highest point in the sky as a knight of the Red Cross paced slowly along the sandy desert near the Dead Sea. He had left his distant northern home to join a cause by which Christians might regain possession of the Holy Land, Palestine, which had been captured by the Turks in the eleventh century.

The dress of the rider, and the accoutrements of his horse, were peculiarly unsuitable for a traveller in such a country. As though his coat of linked mail, with long sleeves and plated gauntlets, were not enough weight of armour, he also carried a heavy triangular shield suspended round his neck. To protect his head he wore a barred helmet of steel, covered by a hood and collar of mail drawn around his shoulders and throat. His legs were sheathed, like his body, in flexible mail. A long, broad, double-edged sword, on his right, shaped like a cross, matched a dagger on the other side. The knight also bore a long steel-headed lance secured to his saddle, with one end resting on his stirrup. Over his armour the knight wore a coat of embroidered cloth, frayed and worn. The knight's coat bore, in several places, the arms of his family, although much defaced. Many a blow had almost effaced the motto on his shield.

This description of the crusader knight portrays one of the thousands of soldiers who journeyed south and east to fight in the religious wars. He stood as a symbol of the clash between two expanding civilizations: Arab Islam and European Christianity.

From the third century onwards, Christians from western Europe and Byzantium went on pilgrimages, either singly or in groups, to the shrines and sacred places of Palestine – the Holy Land. When Islam developed and expanded into Palestine in the seventh century, the Christians were, for the most part, well treated and unhindered in their devotions. Occasionally, however, they suffered insults and ill-treatment from the Moslems. The situation improved during the reign of Charlemagne, crowned Holy Roman emperor in 800, who corresponded with the Caliph Harun al-Rashid of Baghdad. Charlemagne arranged with the Caliph that Christian pilgrims and residents would



The principal points of attack by the first six crusader armies who travelled overland by sea from France, Germany, Italy and England to wrest the Holy Land from the Moslems.

not be molested by the Arabs so long as they paid their taxes and conformed to agreed rules of behaviour.

Appeal to the pope

Moslem tolerance declined in the eleventh century, when the Seljuk Turks, recent and militant converts to Islam, occupied most of the land which forms present-day Turkey, Syria and Palestine. The Seljuks inflicted severe defeats on the armies of the Byzantine empire and threatened its capital, Constantinople. Alexius, the Byzantine emperor, sought military aid from all western Christians and addressed a special appeal to Pope Gregory VII. But Gregory, although sympathetic, could give little practical aid, for he was locked in a struggle for power with the Holy Roman Emperor.

Gregory's successor, Urban II, spurred by reports that Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land were being enslaved and murdered, gave the aid which Gregory had refused. Urban was motivated by much more than the wish to free Palestine. He hoped that western aid would bring the Eastern Orthodox Church (which had split from Rome in 1054) firmly back into the fold. At the same time, he saw a way to rid Europe of the warring feudal lords whose rebellious attitudes frequently threatened the authority of the Church.

In the autumn of 1095 he summoned the

bishops, lords and knights of western Europe to a meeting at Clermont-Ferrand in southern central France. In an impassioned speech, Urban implored them to cease their sterile feuds with each other and to unite into a Christian army to drive the Seljuks from Syria and Palestine. Such a force, he declared, would be God's army fighting God's war against the heathen. His address stirred his listeners: enthusiastically they cried, 'God wills it!' and pledged their swords to the holy cause.

Preparations began immediately for the first and most successful crusade – a word derived from the cross (Latin *crux*) which the knights and their followers wore on their breasts when advancing east, and on their backs when returning home. The First Crusade consisted of two forces. One, badly organized, set off early in 1096 under the leadership of Peter the Hermit, a French monk. Hordes of undisciplined enthusiasts followed the banner of the cross through Europe, taking various routes to Constantinople and over the Bosphorus to Asia. Thousands perished on the march, and those who survived were massacred by the Turks.

The Holy City is saved

A powerfully equipped, more experienced, fighting force set off in the autumn of 1096 under the leadership of Godfrey of Bouillon, Duke of Lower Lorraine and his brother Baldwin; Raymond, Count of Toulouse; and Robert, Duke of Normandy. These men, like most of the crusaders, were French or Flemish. Assembling at

King Louis of France, who was later canonized as a saint, led his Second Crusade to Tunis in 1270 where he died of the plague. In this manuscript, he is leaving Paris with his knights and a procession of devout monks.



Constantinople in 1097, this tougher band of crusaders advanced into Asia Minor, took Edessa and Antioch, and in 1099, after savage fighting, Jerusalem.

The bloodstained knights then set up a Roman Catholic kingdom of Jerusalem, with Godfrey of Bouillon as its ruler. They also founded smaller, Roman Catholic states, dependencies of Jerusalem, at Edessa, Antioch and Tripoli. The defence of the conquered territories was entrusted largely to the Knights Templars and the Knights Hospitallers, bands of priestly soldiers whose energies and skills were dedicated to 'holy war' and the protection and care of pilgrims.

Godfrey and his fellow rulers faced a difficult task. They found themselves rulers of states with few subjects to rule, because the inhabitants had been almost wiped out by the crusaders, and they in turn, having fulfilled their vows to regain the Holy Land, went home. Later, many immigrants from western Europe were persuaded to settle in the new states.

Christian rule lasted nearly half a century before Zangi, a Moslem governor, uniting several Moslem rulers, began a drive of reconquest, continued after his death by his son, Nureddin. Edessa was the first of the crusader cities to be taken. When news of its fall reached Europe, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the most influential figure in the Church at that time, called for another crusade. His preaching aroused great fervour in the west and even Louis VII of France and Conrad III of Germany were persuaded to go crusading. But the Second Crusade was badly organized; the Byzantine emperor, who distrusted the westerners, treacherously betrayed their positions to Nureddin, and this resulted in a crushing defeat by the Turks. When the crusaders failed to take the strategically important city of Damascus, the Second Crusade

The crusaders tried to control their territories in the Middle East from castles built in Moslem style. The huge Hospitallers' Crak des Chevaliers was captured by Saladin in 1188.



petered out without having accomplished anything.

The Third Crusade was sparked off by the actions of Saladin, a Kurdish warrior, whom Nureddin proclaimed sultan of Egypt in 1171, thus for the first time uniting the Moslems of Egypt, Iraq and Syria against the Christian threat. Saladin, a cultured man of great courage and integrity, advanced his empire from the Libyan desert to the river Tigris. His recapture of Jerusalem, one of the three crusader states, for the Moslems in 1187 followed by his capture of most of the cities and castles in the other states of Tripoli and Antioch, led to the Third Crusade (1189–92).

Richard 'Lion-heart' sails alone

In 1189, three European monarchs – the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa ('Red-beard'), Richard I of England, and Philip Augustus of France – each set out with an army, to recover the Holy Land. The French and English kings went by sea, setting sail from Marseilles. Frederick Barbarossa led his forces by land, following the route taken by earlier crusading armies. The enemy leader whom Saladin most feared, Frederick Barbarossa, failed to reach Palestine. Most of his army perished on the march, and he himself was drowned while crossing a swollen stream in Asia Minor. The king of France also played only a small part in the crusade. He quarrelled bitterly with Richard, whose arrogance made him many enemies, and soon returned home, leaving the English king to bear the brunt of the fighting.

Although the English conquered Cyprus en route and captured Acre after a siege, they failed to take Jerusalem. Richard did, however, recover the ports of Haifa, Caesarea and Joppa, and persuaded Saladin to guarantee Christians unmolested access to the Holy Places. Richard, whose feats of arms had earned him the nickname 'Lion-heart', then returned to Europe. Travelling overland, he was caught and imprisoned by the Duke of Austria, with whom he had also quarrelled during the siege of Acre; it was two years before he was ransomed and allowed to return to England, in 1194. After the departure of Richard, Christian power in Palestine steadily declined. The Holy Land was soon under Moslem rule again.



In 1189 Richard I sailed from England to join Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and Philip Augustus of France in the Third Crusade. Here Richard enters Acre in triumph after a long siege.

The Fourth Crusade (1202–04) was launched largely at the instigation of the ambitious Pope Innocent III. It was at this time that the crusaders, led by French barons, struck a bargain with the Venetians, who agreed to transport them by sea from Venice to Palestine. But, being unable to pay the Venetians' fee, the crusaders gave them military assistance in an attack on the Byzantine empire to promote the commercial interests of the



The triumphant entry of the crusaders into Constantinople, painted by Delacroix, shows the savagery and ruthless massacre by knights and their followers in the name of Christ.

Venetians. Outraged at this turn of events, which destroyed all his hopes of a unified Church, Innocent III excommunicated the entire crusader army. Undeterred, the crusaders deposed Alexius, and appointed Baldwin of Flanders as Byzantine emperor in his place. Thus the Fourth Crusade changed the history of the Byzantine empire, but was irrelevant to Palestine. It was an affair between Christians, in which the Moslems were not involved.

The Children's Crusade

The most futile of the expeditions was the Children's Crusade, which took place in 1212. Thirty thousand French boys and girls, led by a shepherd boy named Stephen, and 20,000 German children under the leadership of a lad called Nicholas, set out to accomplish what the military forces had failed to achieve. With touching faith, they believed that the waters of the Mediterranean would divide to let them pass, as they believed that the Red Sea had done for the ancient Jews in their flight from Egypt. They thought that, having crossed to Palestine, another miracle would oust the Moslems from Jerusalem and restore it through them to the Christian faith. Some of the children lost heart and returned home before going very far. Those who continued on the crusade died from hunger or exposure, were drowned at sea, or were seized and sold as slaves. So ended the most tragic of these heroic but sordid adventures.

The Fifth Crusade sailed for Egypt in 1218, and besieged Damietta, hoping to exchange it for Jerusalem. After a siege of 17 months, the sultan of Egypt, Al-Kamil, did indeed offer the return of the whole kingdom of Jerusalem if the crusaders would leave Egyptian soil. But their leader, the papal legate, refused this reasonable offer; the war dragged on and he was finally forced to abandon the siege and return home – a total failure instead of a possible success.

The Sixth Crusade (1228–29) was led by Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor. Frederick II was an odd man to lead a crusade – a free-thinker and heretic who, having driven two popes to despair, was excommunicated by a third, Gregory IX. In the court of Sicily, excommunication mattered little and Frederick could afford to regard it with humorous cynicism. Frederick hit back at Gregory IX by addressing a document to all the crowned rulers of Europe, suggesting that they enter into a union to rid themselves of papal interference in their affairs. Having launched this deadly idea, which was to eat into the basis of papal power, Frederick departed on his 'crusade'.

Arriving in Egypt, Frederick met the sultan, a fellow sceptic in religious questions. The two men concluded a

Crusaders disembarking at Damietta which they besieged during the Fifth Crusade. They hoped to exchange the city for Jerusalem but were forced to retreat by the flooding Nile.





An illuminated capital from a handbook for crusaders, compiled in 1321, depicts Saladin waving a sword at cowering Christians.

commercial agreement and the sultan transferred Jerusalem to Frederick, who became its king. Returning to Lombardy, Frederick drove out the papal armies which had invaded his territories, and forced the pope to end his excommunication.

Crusades of a kind continued into the fifteenth century. They achieved little; most were directed against the growing might of the Ottoman Turks rather than towards recovery of the Holy Places.

The crusades were essentially the product of their time, bound up with the medieval way of life, especially with feudalism. One part of the feudal contract bound vassals to give military aid to their superior lords in return for guaranteed protection. As a result the great feudal lords throughout Europe formed militias, ever ready to engage in private warfare with each other. Only when the opportunity came to fight a powerful common foe did the feudal lords sink their petty disputes and make common cause. The crusaders were professional soldiers for whom war was a most honourable occupation. When lesser lords were not assisting their superiors in military exploits, they found entertainment in plundering a rival's villages, sacking his castles, or holding him to ransom. Appalled at their savagery, the Church introduced in the eleventh century the *Truce of God,* which forbade fighting during Lent and Advent, and between Wednesday night and Monday morning of each week. This curb on the warlike nature of the lords at home, was a powerful factor in sending them off to fight and plunder elsewhere.

Influenced by the enemy

In the long run the most important results of the crusades were economic, social and cultural, rather than political or religious. Paradoxically, they speeded the end of feudalism, because in order to find the money to finance their expeditions, kings and lords took money from their serfs instead of services. East-west trade was given an extraordinary impetus. The products of India, China and Persia came to Syrian seaports to be exchanged for the wares of Europe.

The crusades enriched and broadened the intellectual outlook of medieval Europe by bringing large numbers of Christians into close contact with Islamic culture. Moslem art, geography and science contributed largely to Europe's 'great leap forward' – the Renaissance.

The fall of Constantinople

In the year 1453 the Turkish army under Mehmet II thundered into Constantinople, capital of Byzantium. A valiant, two-month siege had been broken, and an empire had come to an end.

IN THE YEARS following 1066, when England was held fast in the grip of William the Conqueror, certain Anglo-Saxons fled from their homeland to the far-off city of Constantinople. There they took refuge, and many went on to serve in the Byzantine emperor's special bodyguard.

The emperor lived at that time in a magnificence unparalleled amongst Christian rulers. Yet 300 years later, in 1400, the Byzantine emperor Manuel II was himself a supplicant in England before King Henry IV. He had set out the previous year to visit the Christian capitals of Europe in a desperate bid for help to save Constantinople from capture by the Moslem Ottoman Turks. Even then, they were fast closing in upon 'the Queen of cities' as the Byzantines called their capital.

This contrast between earlier splendour and later humiliating poverty came about partly because of weaknesses within the Byzantine Empire itself and partly because of the strength of its enemies and the greed of its Christian neighbours.

From the seventh century onwards the Byzantine Empire had set up military centres in its provinces, manned by officers and soldier-farmers. The system was meant to provide a defence against Arabs, Slavs and Central Asian Turkic tribes. It ended by becoming a network of great military landed families whom even the most powerful emperors failed to control. From the eleventh century onwards the crown even had to grant many of its own rights, such as collecting taxes, to individual landowners in return for military service. Thus the grip of the central authority over the provinces grew continually less effective.

This weakness was increased by intermittent struggles for control of the central government and by the class conflicts in big cities such as Thessalonica, when for a time the poorer people gained control and wreaked their terrible vengeance on the governing class.

Another trouble for the Byzantine government came with the growing power of foreign capitalists within the Empire. It began when the maritime republic of Venice was given special trading privileges in return for naval help against the Normans invading Greece in the eleventh

century. The great trading city of Venice hung on tenaciously to these privileges which give it exemption from paying customs dues in the Byzantine Empire, through which so much lucrative trade passed. As Venice grew in strength so did her Italian rivals Genoa and Pisa, and they too tried to make advantageous trade treaties with Constantinople.

The threatening Turks

While neighbouring Latin powers grew more aggressive from the eleventh century onwards, the difficulties of the Byzantine government were increased by fresh outside attacks directed against all parts of the Empire. From the mid-eleventh century Turkic tribes from Central Asia were hammering on the eastern frontier and by the end of the century Seljuk and other Turks had conquered much of the rich territory of Asia Minor, where they set up their own Moslem principalities. Nomad Turkic tribes raided across the River Danube penetrating far into the Balkans. Norman adventurers reached Italy and took possession of the last remaining Byzantine provinces in the south. To add to Byzantium's troubles, the Crusaders arrived from the Latin West, upsetting Byzantine diplomacy and foreign policy. They set up troublesome, inadequately-defended little Christian states in what had once been the Byzantine provinces of Syria and Palestine.

Little more than 100 years after the First Crusade had set out came the dramatic prelude to the final downfall of Constantinople. In 1203 the West organized the Fourth Crusade which was intended to attack the Moslems, but a year later it turned against the Byzantine capital. Venice was the leading light and profited most from the destruction of the old Byzantine Empire, which safeguarded its trade. Other westerners set up little principalities on Byzantine soil. But the so-called Latin 'Empire' of Constantinople was short-lived. In 1261 the Byzantine emperor recaptured the capital and returned from his exile in Nicaea in northern Asia Minor. But he ruled over a greatly diminished empire and had to tolerate some of the Latin principalities, such as the Duchy of Athens. The Venetians still held their strategic lands and valuable trading posts. Italian families controlled most of the islands of the Aegean Sea. Certain Greek kingdoms such as Epirus in northwest Greece or Trebizond on the southern shore of the Black Sea were never controlled by the Byzantine emperor, now re-established in Constantinople. To all intents and purposes the Byzantine Empire had been effectively broken up by the Fourth Crusade.

For Byzantium the period from 1204 to 1453 was little more than a long-drawn-out death-agony. Constantinople, once 'the city of the world's desire', was worn-out and shabby after its Latin looters had departed; its Byzantine rulers were too poor to rebuild the once-splendid imperial palaces. And although they had turned out the Latins, other and more potent dangers arose. In the mid-thirteenth century the political shape of the Middle East had been changed by the arrival of the Mongols from Central Asia. Although they never actually took possession of Asia Minor, their expeditions in this area caused great upheaval and destruction. Out of the confusion which they left behind there arose a number of small new Moslem Turkish principalities. In the fourteenth century the Byzantines were left with only a bare foothold in Asia Minor, while the Turkish principality of Osman grew in power. These Ottoman Turks were situated almost opposite to Constantinople and frequently served as mercenaries in the armies of the rival Byzantine factions. Then they gained a foothold in Byzantine European territory. Weakened by its long struggle with the Balkans and its other Christian enemies,

Byzantium was unable to prevent the Turks from steadily increasing their stranglehold on the tiny remnant of the Byzantine Empire left in Europe.

The rift between the Churches

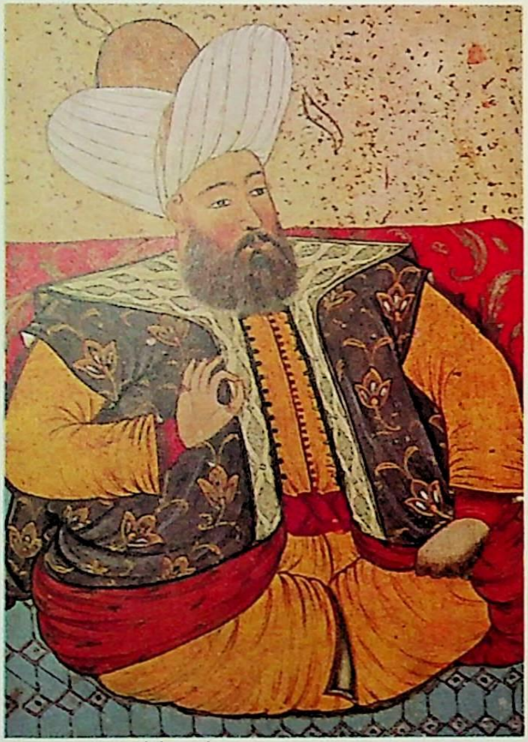
It was in this desperate situation that the Emperor Manuel sought help from Western Christian states in 1399. Emperors before and after him had tried to get western military aid in return for the reunion of the Churches of Rome and Constantinople. These two great branches of Christendom had grown steadily apart, particularly since the eleventh century, and the sack of Christian Constantinople in 1204 by fellow Christians had aggravated the rift. Although Greek rulers and Constantinople's high officials and churchmen might be willing to agree to reunion with Rome in return for military help, this was never the wish of the Byzantine rank and file. Whether laymen or clergy, they preferred to be under Ottoman rule rather than recognize the hated Roman Church.

There were, too, other factors which made it difficult for Byzantium to get effective aid from the West. Certain influential Western parties such as Venice, Genoa and Aragon probably did not want a revitalized and restored Byzantium: they were only concerned to protect their economic interests in the eastern Mediterranean and in the Black Sea, their monopoly of minerals, their control of the grain trade with South Russia and their lucrative customs dues.

The fifteenth-century Byzantine emperors must have realized that the fall of the city was almost inevitable. There is a spirit of resignation in Byzantine writings of the late Middle Ages: the Byzantines accepted their fate as God's punishment for their sins. And yet there is the constant hope that some miracle would occur; that the Virgin, the special protectress of the city, would come to its help. In 1402 the Ottoman Turks were badly defeated at the battle of Ankara in Asia Minor by Tamerlane, the Mongol Timur from the Middle East. To the Byzantine this seemed like divine intervention. But the respite was not for long. When in 1451 the Byzantine ambassador and historian Sphrantzes learnt of the accession of Mehmet II to the Ottoman throne, he said: 'This is the worst news that I could possibly hear.' The new young sultan was ruthless and determined and had announced that as soon as he controlled the reins of authority he would 'destroy the Empire of the Romans and bring all the Christian Empires to nought'.

Mehmet, 'cunning as a fox', soon showed

Sultan Murad II. From 1421 to 1451 he widely extended Ottoman power in southeast Europe. But he was a lover of culture first and it was left to his successor to crush Constantinople





Variously described as ruthless, determined and cunning as a fox, Mehmet II made it his avowed ambition to 'bring all the Christian Empires to nought'.

his hand. Constantinople was built on a triangle of land with the sea on two sides and on the west, a land-wall. The long narrow sea inlet on the northern side formed the harbour known as the Golden Horn. Both land and sea boundaries were fortified. Once the capital had commanded the entrance to the sea of Marmora and the passage through the Bosphorus straits to the Black Sea. But now the Asia Minor



Rumeli Hisar, built as a fort by Mehmet in 1452, gave him direct command of the Bosphorus, the narrow sea passage which Constantinople depended on for access to the Black Sea.

shore was in Ottoman hands, with a fort called Anadolu Hisar standing on the Asian bank of the Bosphorus.

During the spring of 1452 Mehmet built another fort called Rumeli Hisar on the European slopes of the Bosphorus (where it still stands). The Ottomans thus commanded the Bosphorus. Beyond the massive fortified walls on the western land side of the city, Mehmet was known to be massing his troops in Thrace. He was said



A map of Constantinople in 1453 shows the three city walls, the positioning of the Turkish divisions and the defences of the besieged garrison before the final attack was launched.

to have at least 150,000 men between the sea of Marmora and the Golden Horn, including the famous regular soldiers, the Janissaries, as well as many irregulars called Bashi-Bazouks and innumerable hangers-on out for plunder. His artillery included enormous cannons. The largest needed 60 oxen to drag it up to the walls of Constantinople and 200 men to keep it in place on its wagon. By early April 1453 the Turkish army was outside the land-walls.

Constantinople's defences

The Byzantines had refused an offer to spare their city if it surrendered. They shut their land gates on 2 April and broke down the bridges over the 60-foot-wide *foss* or ditch. The fortifications were arranged in three lines: the inner wall was approximately 40 feet high with lofty towers at intervals; a second or outer wall with towers ran parallel to it; the third wall was a kind of crenellated breast-work which formed the inner wall of the foss. These fortifications were entered through gates placed at intervals. Half-way along the wall the ground dipped forming the little valley of the River Lycus. It was here in this valley that the Ottomans concentrated their attack. The besieged were estimated by Sphrantzes, the emperor's secretary, as numbering 6,983 men including 2,000 foreigners, mainly Venetians and Genoese. Among them was the famous Genoese soldier Giustiniani, who took charge of the defence of the land-walls, concentrating on the second or outer wall since the inner wall was in a bad state of repair. A great chain or boom had been placed across the entrance to the Golden Horn and ships were stationed across the boom to protect it. On the north shore of the Golden Horn was the suburb Galata, the walled city of the Genoese trading colony, which was playing a waiting game of uneasy neutrality.

Turkish troops took up their place before the land-walls with their heavy artillery; the sultan's brilliantly coloured tent was pitched opposite the Lycus valley sector of the front, while the Turkish fleet in the Bosphorus and the sea of Marmora tried to cut off supplies and to force their way across the boom into the Golden Horn. From 12 April onwards the Turkish guns bombarded the city walls and the Turkish soldiers tried to fill in the foss. Great gaps were made in the outer wall which the Christians were defending. On 20 April four Genoese ships dodged through the Turkish fleet and reached the Golden Horn behind the boom. This defeat stirred up Mehmet to renew his attempts to gain possession of the Golden

Constantinople's Golden Gate: placed at the seaside end of the outer wall, it was one of seven gates which studded the defence. They were closed shortly before the Turkish army arrived.





In 1549 the Byzantine emperor Manuel II visited the capitals of Europe to appeal for help to save Constantinople from the Turks. He failed, and the city was doomed.

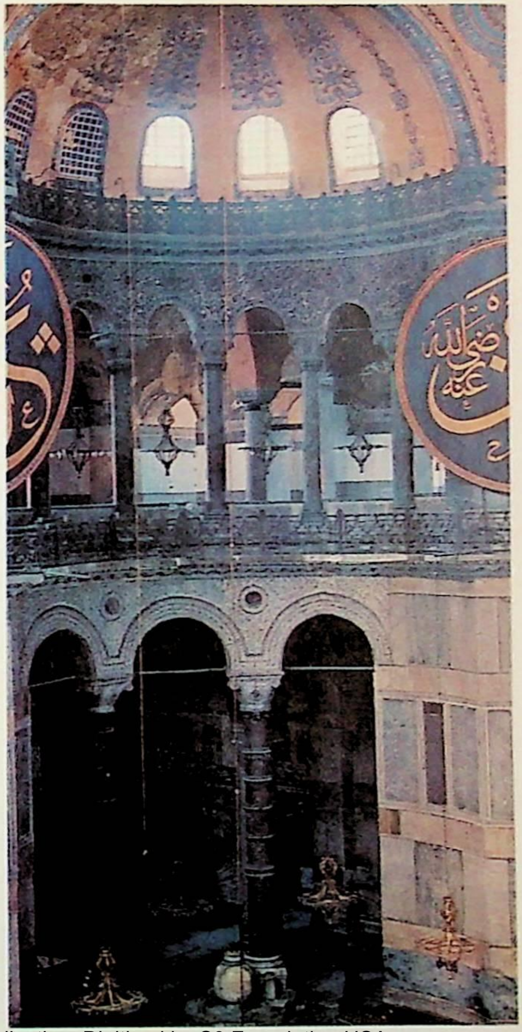
Horn. His engineers now contrived to bring ships overland from the Bosphorus into the Golden Horn. They were fixed on wheeled cradles and dragged over rollers by oxen – to the dismay of the Christians, on 22 April about 70 Turkish ships made their appearance in the Golden Horn.

Dark omens and defeat

The struggle dragged on for another month. Within the city Greeks, Genoese and Venetians quarrelled. Food and ammunition were short. A ship which got through on 23 May reported that no Venetian rescue fleet could be seen in the Aegean. Meanwhile Mehmet keyed up his forces for a final general assault planned for 29 May, promising three days' unrestricted looting. Then on 28 May there was silence in the Turkish camp and its soldiers rested and fasted before the assault.

Inside the city Mehmet's intentions were realized. During the days of 25–27 May there had been bad omens. The picture of the Mother of God had fallen to the ground as it was being carried in procession round the city; this was followed by a thunderstorm and a cloudburst and a dark fog; strange lights were seen playing over Santa Sophia, the cathedral of the Holy Wisdom. The emperor was advised to leave the city which God had abandoned,

Inside Santa Sophia, the Cathedral of the Holy Wisdom. Shortly before the fall of the city, strange lights full of ill-omen flickered above; days later it was a Turkish mosque.



but he refused. On the evening before the attack all, Greek and Latin alike, went to the cathedral and there they celebrated the last Christian Liturgy to be held in the Great Church. Then each man went to his post on the outer wall. About an hour after midnight the attack began: first the Bashi-Bazouks, then the Anatolian Turks and finally the Janissaries. At the crucial moment the Genoese leader, Giustiniani, was wounded and carried through the inner wall into the city to a Genoese ship in the harbour. Amidst the dismay this caused, Mehmet spurred on his Janissaries, who succeeded at last in breaking the stockade at the outer wall and gaining access to the city through the inner wall. Other Turks had made their way through a small postern gate to the north and had raised the Turkish standard. The cry went up: 'The city is taken.'



An engraving of the Turks sweeping into Constantinople illustrates the Christian accounts of atrocity and bloodshed. Yet quarters which voluntarily submitted appear to have been spared.

'The spider is now the watchman'

The Turkish entry was followed by panic amongst the Christians. Barbaro, a Venetian who was present, tells how everybody who could do so escaped by ship, but so many were killed that their heads in the Golden Horn and the sea of Marmora reminded him of melons floating in the canals of Venice. Certain quarters of the city seem to have been spared, probably because they voluntarily submitted to the Turks. Mehmet himself rode first to the church of the Holy Wisdom which was at once converted into a mosque; then he went to the imperial Great Palace, never fully repaired after the sack of 1204. He is said to have quoted two lines from a Persian poem, 'The spider is now the watchman of the imperial palace and has woven the hangings before the doorway. The mournful song of the owl echoes through the imperial tombs of Afrasaib.'

The city was rapidly rebuilt, refortified and repopulated. Mehmet allowed his Greek subjects to keep their religion and he encouraged the election of a new Patriarch, Gennadius, who repudiated all union with Rome and was given control of the once independent Orthodox Churches of Serbia and Bulgaria. Many Greek magnates served the Ottoman state, which by the end of the fifteenth century controlled Greece, the Balkans and Asia Minor. It was a humiliating fate for an empire convinced of its universal mission. But Byzantium had served Christendom well: it had kept the Arabs out of much of Europe; it had taught the young Slav nations their statecraft and had brought them Christianity; it had given the world its own creative medieval art and its Greek heritage of literature and science. And even under Ottoman domination its people were still able to keep alive their Church, their Greek language and their Hellenic national spirit, all of which were to flower again after independence had been gained in the nineteenth century.

The Moors in Europe

Spain's Islamic conquerors set up a civilization that recharged a stagnating Europe. But in an inglorious finish, the Christians threw out the people who had so enriched their lives.

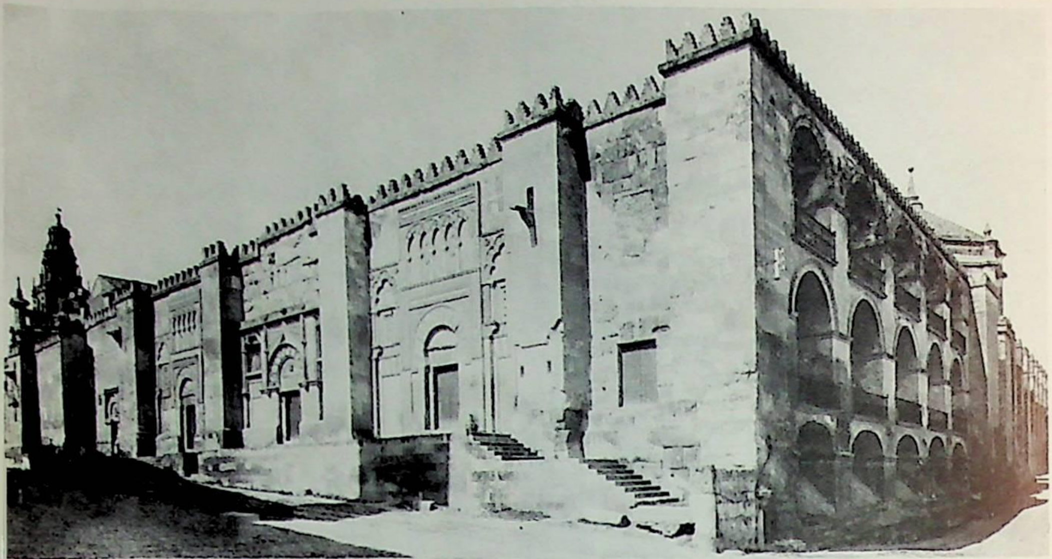
EUROPE IN THE TENTH CENTURY was going through one of its darker ages. The glorious Roman Empire had long since fallen to the Germanic barbarians; in the place of the mighty empire were many smaller, fragmented states enjoying none of the security, prosperity or culture of the past. But in the southwest corner of Europe there had emerged a brilliant contrast to this bleak picture, a civilization outshining by far anything Europe could offer.

Here was the Spanish city of Cordoba, the largest, wealthiest, most civilized city in Western Europe. Visitors marvelled at its main streets, lit and paved, a state of luxury unheard of elsewhere. With its beautiful architecture, its large houses and population of half a million, the city was also noted for its 300 public baths, its 70 libraries and its numerous bookshops. Scholars from all over Europe recognized its advanced standards of art and learning. As a city or a centre of culture only Constantinople, the Byzantine capital, could compare.

Quarrels among Goths

Perhaps the most striking feature of the city was its 700 mosques. For unlike Constantinople, heart of Eastern Christendom, Cordoba was a Moslem city, the capital of Islamic Spain in the tenth century. The Iberian peninsula had changed greatly since its days as a province of the Roman Empire. First it had been conquered by a tribe of barbarians, the Visigoths. Then, in the early years of the eighth century, an army of Moslem Arabs from North Africa had sailed across what are now called the Straits of Gibraltar, to invade the Visigoth's kingdom.

Chroniclers at the time wrote that the Moslems were encouraged to invade by one Count Julian, a Gothic lieutenant in North Africa who was incensed that King Roderick had seduced his daughter, studying at Toledo, the Visigoths' capital. This is the legend; at any rate the Moslems profited by the Goths' decadence, and their quarrels amongst themselves. Gothic



A mosque at Cordoba, showing the ornate Moorish architecture. Mohammed, Islam's founder, ordered his followers to conquer unbelievers though not necessarily to convert them.

strongholds like Seville and Toledo soon fell to the Moslem armies and within the short space of seven years (711–718) most of the peninsula lay in their hands. These Moslem conquerors, who came to be known as Moors, were to rule in Spain for more than seven centuries. Although their Christian enemies grew strong enough to drive back the Moors from the thirteenth century onwards, it was not until the fifteenth century, and the joint forces of Ferdinand and Isabella, that the Moors were overrun and the Christian re-conquest of Spain completed.

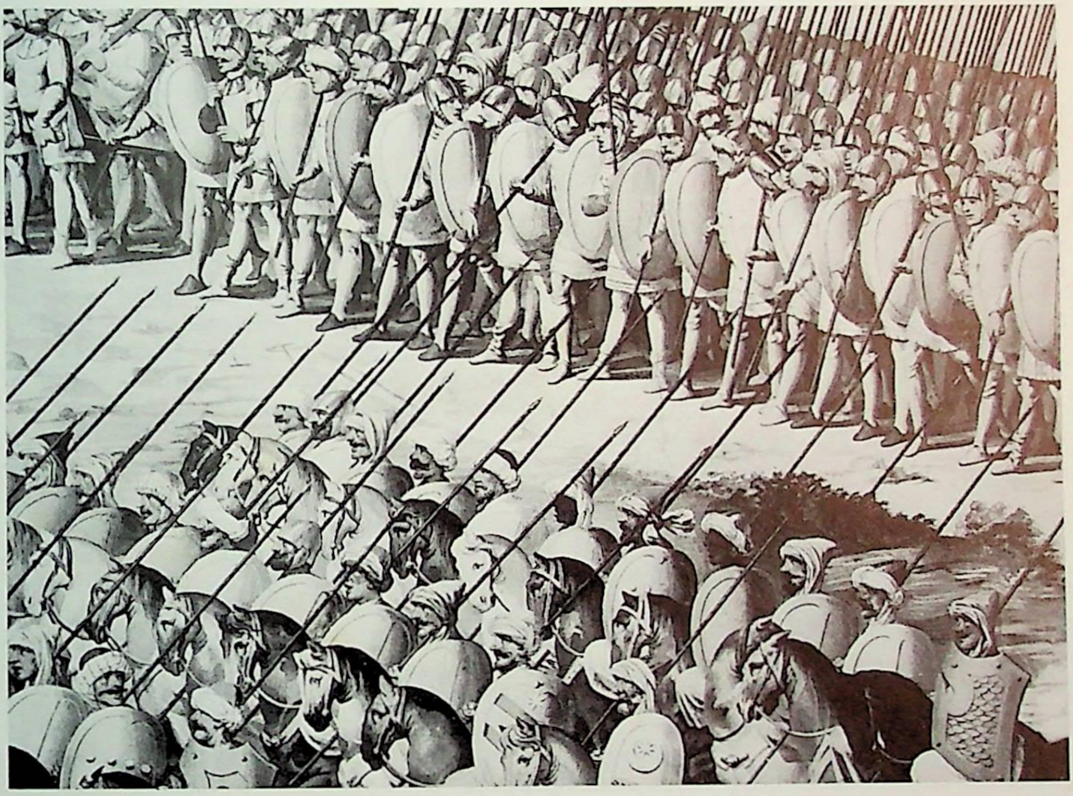
The Moslem invasion of Spain, although sudden and unexpected, was a quite natural extension of the Islamic Empire, a continuation of the mighty Arab onslaught against infidel unbelievers. Since the death of the prophet Mohammed in 632, the Arabian peoples, exalted by their new faith, had expanded their domains enormously. Attacking their neighbours on all sides, they had eaten into the Byzantine Empire and crippled that of the Persians. Within a century they had taken Iraq, Syria and Egypt and progressed right along the coastlands of North Africa. Driven on as much by the desire for plunder as Islam's command to subject the infidel, it was only a matter of time or opportunity before they attacked the weak Visigoths in Spain.

Nor did they intend to stop at Spain. In 720 Moorish armies crossed the Pyrenees into the land of the Franks, taking Narbonne and sacking the greatest monasteries of southern France. But in 732, near Tours, the Moors were defeated in a pitched battle with Charles Martel, prince of the Franks. Historians once regarded this battle as the saving of Christendom from the Moslem menace. This is certainly an exaggeration. Fighting continued in Provence for several decades afterwards. It was only gradually after several more such defeats that the Moors accepted they were achieving little and abandoned their raids and ambitions north of the Pyrenees. Far more important for Christian Europe

was the failure of the Moslems in the East. In 717–718 they had attacked Constantinople. Had the Byzantine Emperor, Leo the Isaurian, not successfully repulsed them, it seems probable that the whole of Eastern Europe would have been overrun, as was to happen seven centuries later with the Ottoman Turks. But for the moment Islam had to be content with Spain as its only foothold in Europe.

Unlike the Romans, or even the Visigoths, the Moors were unable to create a strong, centralized rule over the people of Spain. They were never able to subdue parts of the northwest, the area where Christian kingdoms were to emerge in strong resistance to the Moorish invaders. The Moors' new land, which they called Al-Andalus, had no fixed northern frontier, and there was a shifting no-man's-land between Al-Andalus and Charlemagne's territory. Here there was continuous raiding – Charlemagne, King of the Franks, himself hoped to subdue the Moors, but failed badly in his attempt to capture Saragossa, in 778. After this Charlemagne left Spain alone. But the Moors were also up against independent-minded rulers in outlying provinces, and restless subjects in the cities. There were several notorious bloodbaths in dealing with such insurrections. In 797 the governor of Toledo, believing his people restless, arranged a banquet for selected guests at his newly built castle. As each entered the courtyard a sword fell upon

Moorish troops drawn up for battle. Many Christians, including at one time El Cid, the great Spanish hero, fought for the invaders.



his neck. The corpses were then thrown into a long ditch freshly dug for building purposes; this incident came to be known as the 'day of the ditch'. Not long afterwards a whole section of Cordoba's populace – 300 people – were massacred and their dwellings ploughed into the ground.

Much of the fighting in the early years of the Moorish conquest was not so much religious conflicts between Moslem and Christian as power struggles between local rulers. Religion was often of little account; indeed men readily changed their religion to swear allegiance to a new lord. The famed Spanish hero, El Cid, was a nobleman from the Christian kingdom of Castile who first changed sides to fight for the Moors, then later broke away to lead his own, independent, army. The Moors' difficulties in creating an organized state out of such turbulent chaos were aggravated by divisions amongst themselves. Fierce rivalry developed between the Arabs and the Berbers, the North African tribesmen who had been converted to Islam and provided most of the men for the invasion of Spain.

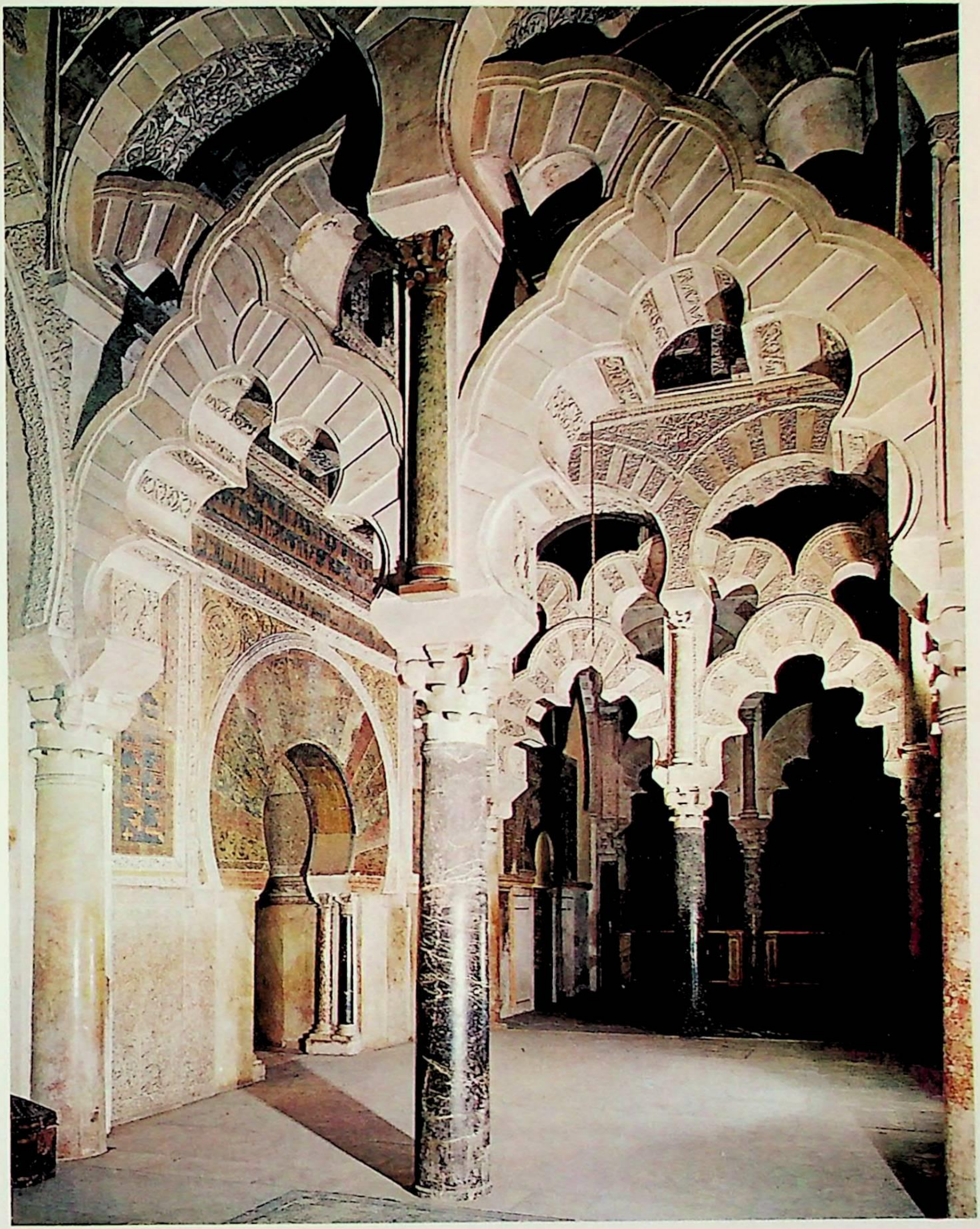
It was not until the rule of Abd-al-Rahman III (912–961) that the Moorish state was set on a secure footing. Abd-al-Rahman inherited a formidable task. Such had been the success of provincial revolts and Christian raids that the Moslem conquest had shrunk to Cordoba and its environs. Gradually, however, Abd-al-Rahman recovered the lost provinces and began to forage northwards into the Christian kingdoms of Leon and Navarre. Under his successors, until the end of the tenth century, Moslem rule in Spain became more complete than at any other time.

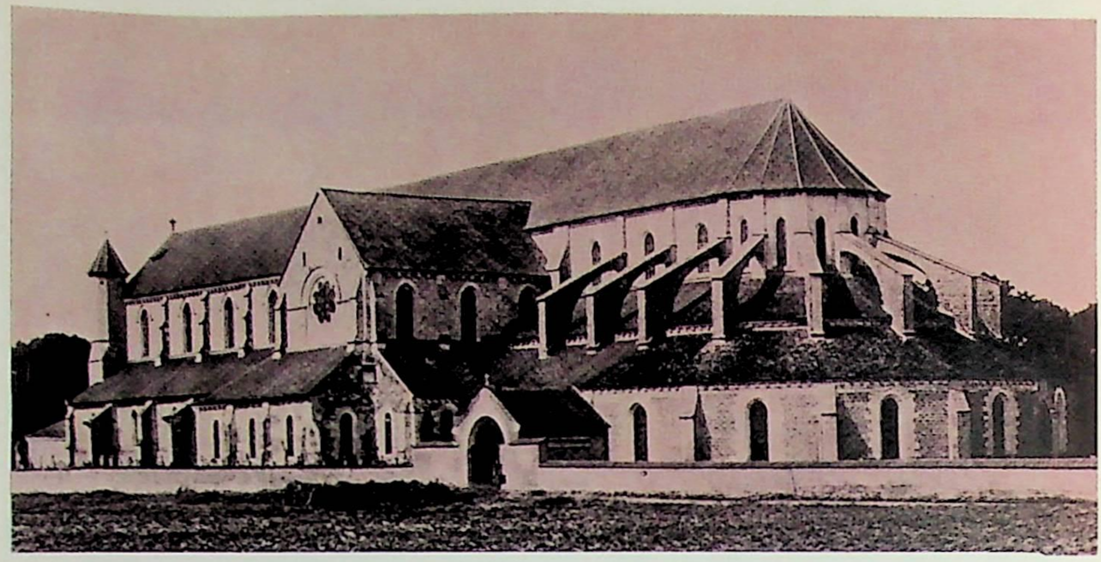
Much of the quality of the Moorish civilization which flourished in the tenth century around Cordoba stemmed from the Moors' tolerance towards their subject peoples. Although there was a bitter power struggle with the Christian kingdoms, the Christians living under Moorish rule were allowed to practise their own religion freely. Islam dictated only that non-Moslems be subjected to Moslem rule, not necessarily converted to the Moslem faith. Many Jews in Spain, who had been viciously persecuted under the Visigoths, were allowed to live in peace under the Moors; in fact Jewish merchants were responsible for much of Islamic Spain's prosperous trade. But both Jews and Christians, as non-Moslems, had to pay tribute taxes. They also suffered some inequality before the law and were generally regarded as inferiors by their Moorish masters.

The Christian's attitude to the Moors was a confused dilemma. On the one hand the Christians could not help appreciating that the Moors had created a civilization superior to their own. Spanish towns, in decline under the Visigoths, revived under the Moors. There was order, with officials and regulations; and organization, with guilds and corporations. The Moors were better tradesmen, better architects, better engineers and better farmers than the Christians. They were better read and more cultured. The Christians realized all this, even the Christian rulers of the kingdoms in the north. One writer has commented that whenever the Christian rulers needed a surgeon, an architect, a master-singer or a dressmaker, it was to Cordoba they applied. When the Christians finally recaptured Seville in the thirteenth century, the soldiers entering the city could not repress their amazement at its splendour.

On the other hand the Christians were determined to overcome their own inferiority and to recapture their lands from the invader. But this spirit was strongest in

A striking example of the intricacies of Moorish architecture. Their lead in other fields, such as medicine, agriculture and commerce, made Spain one of the wealthiest areas in Europe.





A twelfth-century Cistercian abbey church built in the much more simple Gothic style. It was said that Christian rulers, when they wanted an architect, applied to Cordoba.

the Christian kingdoms emerging in the north, outside Moorish territory. For many Christians under Moorish rule the lure of Arab superiority was strong enough for them to become converts to Islam. They were known as Muwallahs. Graduallv it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between these Spanish Moslems and the Arab Moslem population, particularly with the high degree of intermarriage between the Arabs and the native people. Most of the Moors arrived in Spain without women and took Spanish wives. Intermarriage extended to the highest level; Christian noblemen, even kings, offered their daughters in marriage to their Moslem overlords. Many Christians while not fully embracing the Moslem faith did adopt Arab manners and customs.

Boom in trade

Far from being a clash between the religions, here was a very fruitful partnership. With Jews, Christians and Moslems living and working together, Moorish Spain became one of the wealthiest and most thickly populated areas of Europe. Agriculture flourished, with the Moors bringing to Spain new methods of irrigation as well as numerous new crops and fruits such as rice, cotton, oranges, apricots and peaches. Industry thrived, Al-Andalus being particularly noted for its magnificent textiles, furs and pottery. Trade boomed as far afield as India and Central Asia. Scholarship and learning were stimulated by the Moors' access, through Moslem culture in the East, to the best of Greek and Roman thought and Byzantine and Persian art. Standards in medicine and science were well in advance of other states. Education was so widely spread that a high proportion of Spanish Moslems could read and write, a situation unknown in the rest of Europe.

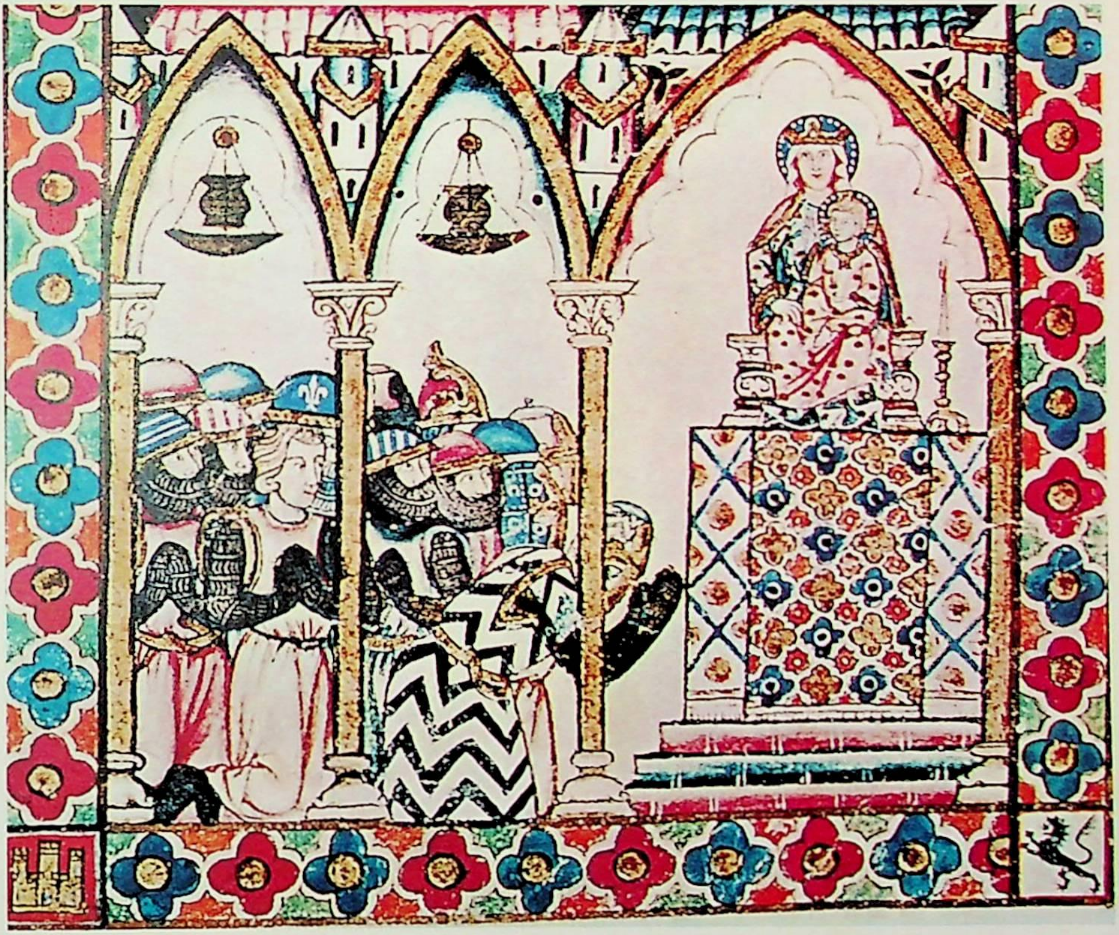
From the beginning of the eleventh century, however, the Moorish state began to fall apart. Petty disputes between rival leaders weakened the central authority, giving the Christian kingdoms precisely the opportunity they wanted. Instead of paying tribute to the Moors, the Christian

kingdoms began to demand tribute from the various Moorish factions. The Christian King Alfonso VI even managed to extract tribute from Seville, now the strongest Moorish city after the decline of Cordoba. In 1085 the Christians captured Toledo. It was never again to be in Moorish hands.

Such was the shock of this defeat to the Moors that they decided to invite a tribe of Berbers, the Almoravides, from North Africa to help in what had become a desperate struggle against the Christians. But these crude and war-like Berbers were unable to restore the civilized rule of their Moorish predecessors. A policy of savage intolerance against non-Moslem subjects drove thousands of Christians and Jews out of Al-Andalus into the Christian kingdoms. As Moorish fortunes declined further another horde of Berbers, the Almohades, were summoned from North Africa in 1146.

Although the Almohades established a brilliant capital at Seville – to become renowned as a vigorous intellectual cen-

A scene from a series of parchments, called *Songs of the Virgin Mary*, commissioned by Alfonso the Wise. It shows Christian knights giving thanks after victory over the Moors.



tre they were unable to hold back the Christian advance. In 1212 the Christian King Alfonso VIII inflicted a decisive defeat on the Moors at Tolosa. After this all hopes of reviving Moorish dominion over Spain collapsed. Al-Andalus was to be carved up between the Christian sovereigns and local Moslem rulers.

The Christians' strength had always suffered from the separate Christian kingdoms quarrelling amongst themselves. But by 1230, with the union of Leon and Castile (on the edge of Al-Andalus and so called for its defensive castles), the Christians really took the offensive. In quick succession Ferdinand III recaptured Cordoba (1236), Valencia (1238), and after an arduous siege, Seville (1248).

Only one Moorish centre now remained, that of the Nasrids at Granada. Although it was only able to survive by paying a heavy tribute to Ferdinand III, the Nasrid court, at the magnificent Alhambra Palace, saw the revival of earlier Moorish glories. Nothing was spared in making the Alhambra as splendid as possible – there was even a system of flushing toilets in some bedrooms, ingeniously created by means of a river diverted to flow through the palace. Like Cordoba and Seville before it, Granada too became a centre of both commerce and learning, attracting

1 The 'occupation' saw a new art style called Mozarabic evolve. This example, from the eighth-century *Commentary on the Apocalypse,* shows how it combined Islamic miniatures and the primitive idioms of Visigoth folk-art.

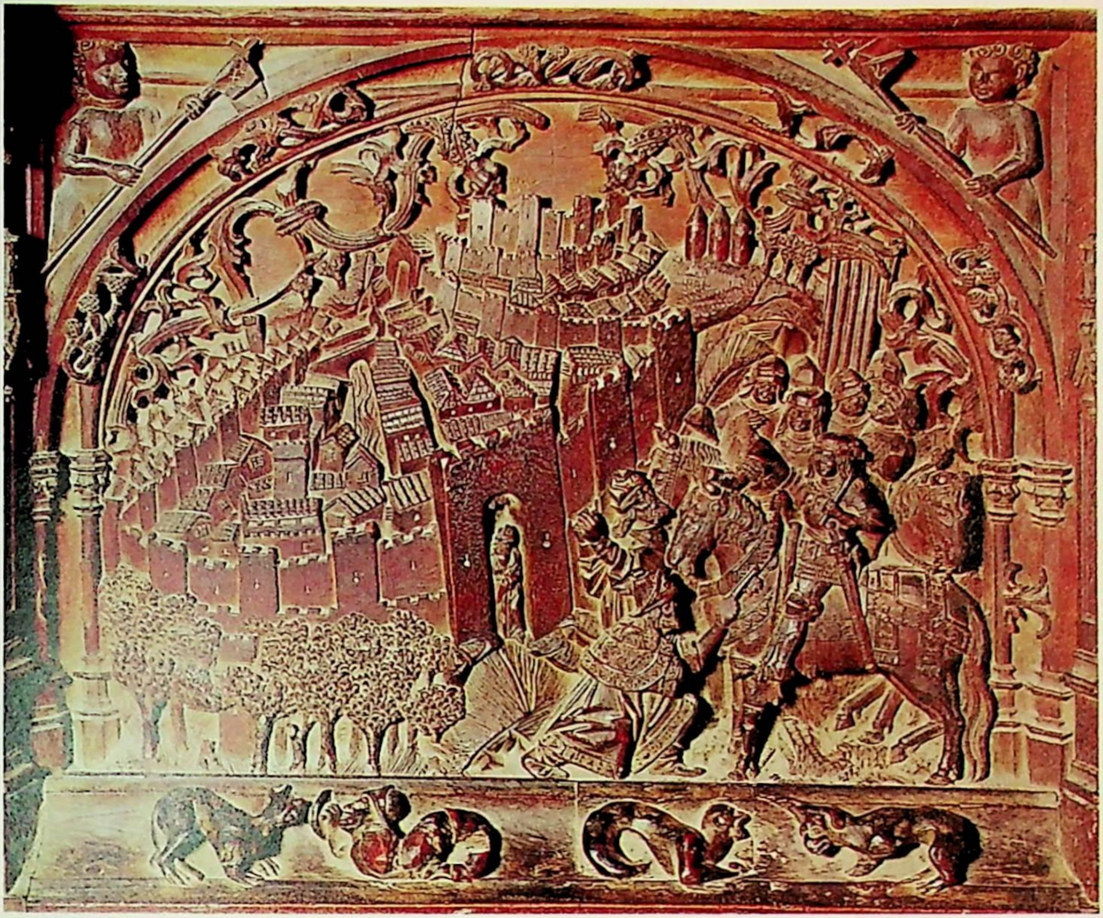
2 One of the famous series of vases in lustre and blue made for the Alhambra palace. The Moors brought to Europe all that was best in Byzantine and Persian art.

1



2





Wood carving in Toledo Cathedral showing the surrender of Granada, the last Moorish stronghold in Spain, in 1492. A wave of persecution and destruction followed the Christian victory.

scholars from Europe and the East.

But the Christian leaders were impatient to reclaim all Spain for themselves. Under the combined forces of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, Granada was taken in 1492, the year Columbus discovered America. Christian rule was not to prove so tolerant as that of the Moors. Ferdinand and Isabella not only expelled the Jews (1493), but they tried to force the Moors to convert to Christianity. Some did, becoming known as Moriscos, but a vicious Inquisition was set up to harry those thought to be insincere. The Christians now turned against everything Moslem. Ferdinand and Isabella had Arabic manuscripts burned in the streets. Later Philip II ordered the destruction of all Moorish baths. Finally in 1609 any remaining Moriscos, perhaps half a million, were forcibly deported en masse. It is estimated that between 1492 and 1609 about three million Moors had been banished or executed. Christian Spain could find no role for them.



Details from a pillar in the beautiful Alhambra palace, Granada. The Moors spared nothing to make it as magnificent as possible, even diverting a river to provide flushing toilets.

Arab discoveries

It was an inglorious ending to the history of the Moors. Spain, indeed all Europe, was greatly in their debt. It was through Moorish Spain that Europe's stagnating mind became acquainted not only with the advanced art and scholarship of the East but with Greek philosophy. Spanish thinkers such as Maimonides and Averroës not only interpreted and translated the learning of the ancients, but passed it on to European scholars attracted to Toledo or Seville.

It was through the Moors that many Arab discoveries were introduced to Europe. Knowledge of how to make paper passed into Spain from Morocco in the mid-twelfth century, and from there into France. It is probable that Arabic numerals and the concept of zero were introduced to Europe through Moorish Spain, although Italy is another possibility. Above all the Moors had established in Spain a civilization all of its own, much of which lives on to this day. Great efforts had been made to create beauty of all kinds. Poetry, especially love-poetry, seemed to flow in the Moors' veins. Music was another passion – Europe owes the lute, as well as the oval guitar to the Moors. Many of their superb buildings, their mosques and palaces, remain for all to visit and admire, witness to a past Christian Spain could ill afford to reject.

The Crescent over Europe

Few nations have ever expanded their boundaries so ruthlessly and swiftly as the Ottoman Turks. But eventually the very size of their empire defeated them and they sank into political eclipse.

ON 29 MAY 1453 the great city of Constantinople, capital of eastern Christendom and once the dazzling centre of Byzantine learning and civilization, fell to the Turks, a race of Moslem warriors advancing west from the Asian steppes. After years of preparation and a final siege lasting two months, the mighty army and navy of Sultan Mehmet II had captured the walled city to fulfil a longstanding Turkish ambition. As was customary in cities captured by storm, the sultan's troops ravaged Constantinople for plunder and loot, and men, women and children were slaughtered mercilessly until blood ran in rivers down the streets.

To the banks of the Danube

As streams of refugees fled across the Bosphorus into Europe, news of the city's fall sent tremors of fear throughout Christendom. Yet the fall cannot have been altogether unexpected for the Turks' victory was the climax of more than a century of Turkish expansion. What perhaps explains the profound shock felt in the West is that Europe had chosen largely to ignore what had been happening in its southeastern corner.

By 1340 the Turks had seized as much as possible of the Byzantine Empire in Asia Minor. Then, crossing the Bosphorus into Europe, within ten years they proceeded to secure nearly all the Byzantine possessions in Europe, pushing on into the Balkans, through Thrace and Macedonia to Bulgaria and Serbia. Eight years later the Turkish armies had advanced as far as the banks of the Danube.

What provoked this driving expansion? The earliest Ottomans, named from Sultan Osman, whose father had founded their state in Anatolia in the mid-thirteenth century, were *ghazis,* Moslem warriors dedicated to fighting to the death religious wars against the infidel Christians, and to extending the Moslem frontier. Another powerful motive for doing battle was the desire for plunder; indeed the supremacy of the Ottomans over other communities of Turkish ghazis came about largely because the Ottoman state, which bordered on Byzantium, offered greater opportunities for expansion and booty than any other state, and thus attracted the most able Turkish fighters.

As Ottoman territory grew, religious zeal against the enemy became less important. What had begun as a holy war against the Christians turned into a more materialistic struggle for land, slaves and plunder. The capture of Constantinople



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In 1453, Sultan Mehmet II rode triumphantly into the Hippodrome at Constantinople. After a two-month siege the Byzantine capital had finally fallen to his army.

gave these free-booting hordes a natural capital, particularly well sited for an empire with provinces in both Europe and Asia Minor. From then on the Ottoman Empire had something of a structure – with a settled centre at Constantinople, able to expand on the edges wherever possible.

As the Ottomans advanced their frontiers, they found that Europe offered little resistance. For one thing the Christian powers were divided amongst themselves and the earlier crusading spirit of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, when the Christian states joined in sending vast collective armies in holy wars against the Moslems, had almost entirely vanished. The rise of Byzantium itself had split Christendom, and the continuing disputes between the Papacy and the Greek Orthodox Church, whose leader, or patriarch, sat at Constantinople, were one reason for the failure of any combined Christian attempt to save the city.

Even the alarming fall of Constantinople failed to warn Europe that the Ottoman menace could be met only by a united front. In the following centuries the



Suliman's greatest victory was won at the Battle of Mohacs, where his troops totally routed the Hungarian heavy cavalry. This miniature shows the Turkish army on the battlefield.

rivalry between the French king and the Habsburg emperor, between the old Catholicism and the new Protestantism, reduced the possibility of effective opposition still further. No one came to the aid of Hungary at the crucial battle of Mohacs in 1526, and even when the Ottomans penetrated as far as Vienna three years later, they found it defended by the Habsburgs only. Had the Ottomans not had their own problems during the great chaos in Europe caused by the disastrous Thirty Years' War (1618–48), they could have made even more spectacular advances. It was not until the late seventeenth century that Europe smoothed over its divisions to present anything like its full strength against them.

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of the Turkish advance was the might of the Ottoman armies. The Ottomans' extraordinary fighting strength was based on two elements: the first being the *sipahis* – light and mobile cavalry who easily outmanoeuvred the ponderous and undisciplined heavy cavalry of European armies. Enticed onwards by the continual promise of fresh plunder, they were constantly on the move fighting new campaigns.

The second element, the *janissaries*, a corps of infantry archers later equipped with hand guns, were the sultan's own crack troops. Forbidden to marry or to take up civilian trades, they were renowned for their discipline and bravery, and for their unquestioned loyalty to the sultan. They were all slaves, taken from the conquered lands in the Balkans, through the *devsirme* system. At irregular intervals every three or five years, levies were taken of all Christian boys between eight and 20 who were then given special training. After becoming converts to Islam they were destined not only for the janissaries but – the best of them – for the highest offices of state, both in the army and in the administration. Indeed they could look forward to far greater power than any Moslem subjects, whose careers were limited to the religious hierarchy.



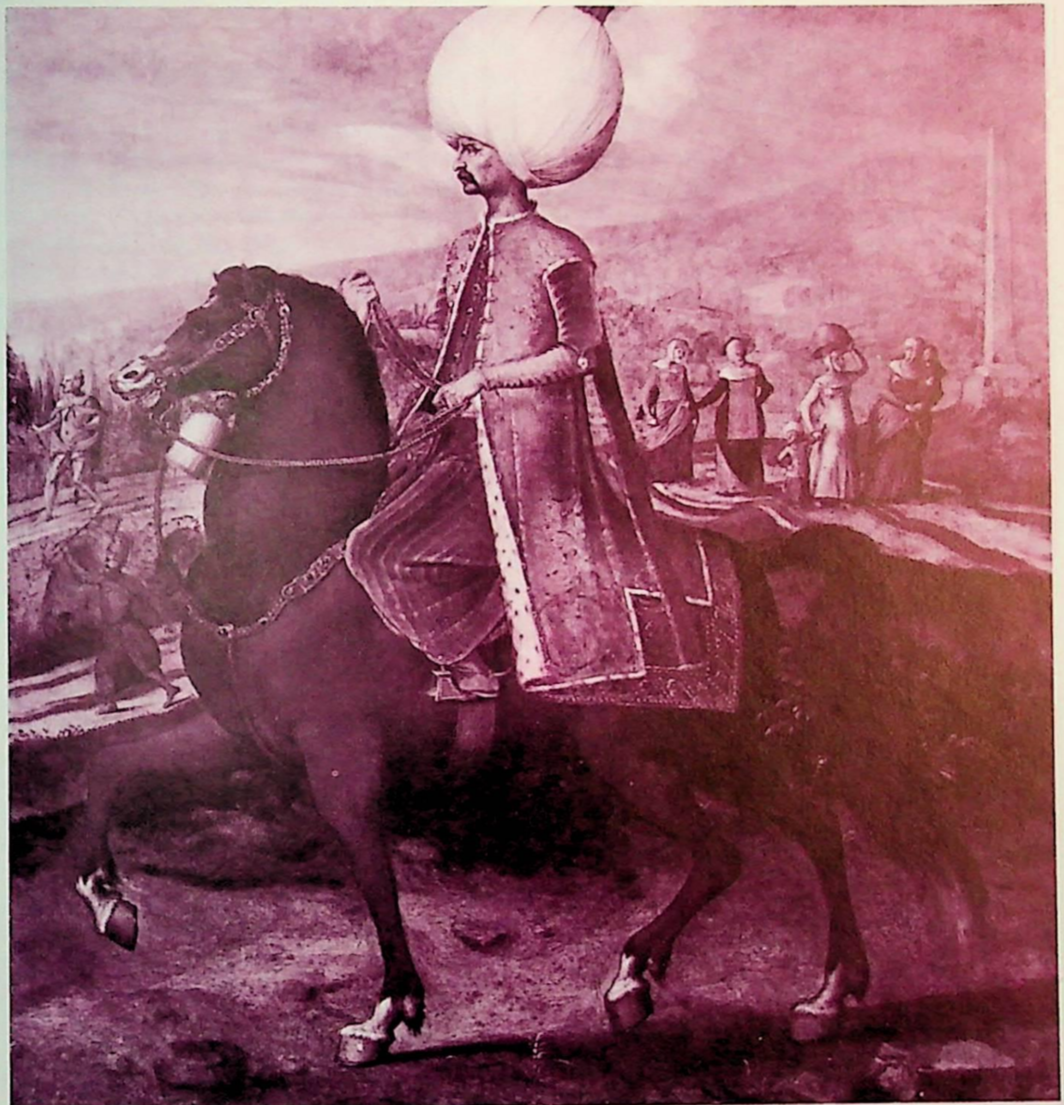
Crack troops in the Turkish army were the janissaries, a corps of infantry archers renowned for their discipline, courage, and for their unquestioned loyalty to the sultan.

With all important state posts filled by slaves, competing on their merits alone, the way was open for outstandingly able men to reach the top. This made for a far more efficient bureaucratic and military machine than most European states could offer, hindered as they were by corruption, nepotism and inherited feudalism. At the hub of this machine was the sultan, who personally led his armies into battle. In theory his power was virtually absolute.

Perhaps the greatest of the sultans was Suliman the Magnificent, and it was under his rule (1520–66) that the Ottoman Empire rose to its zenith. Within a year of becoming sultan, Suliman marched against Hungary and took Belgrade. A few years later, at Mohacs in 1526, he won the greatest of his victories when his janissaries routed the heavy cavalry of the

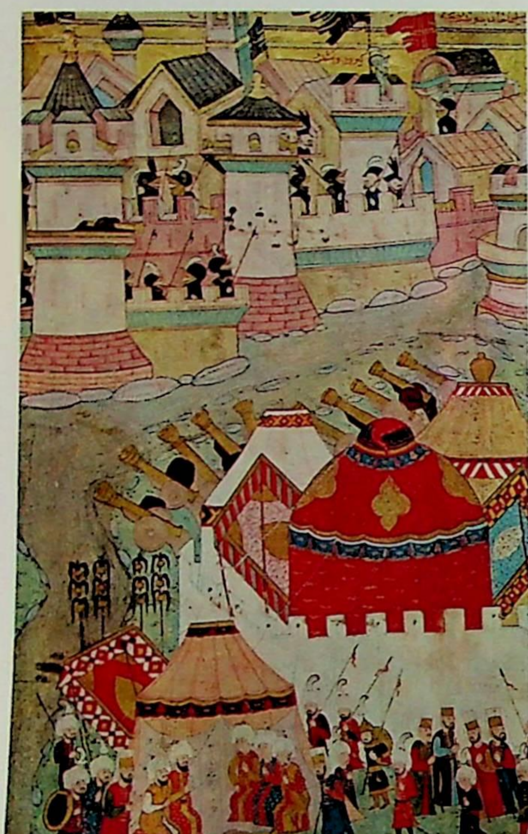
Hungarian magnates, killing the Hungarian king in the battle. From there he advanced to plunder Buda, but by this time a claim to the vacant Hungarian throne had come from Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, brother of the Habsburg emperor, Charles V, and in 1529 Suliman's attempt to take Ferdinand's capital city, Vienna, was successfully repulsed. Thereafter, although the Ottomans remained in control of most of Hungary, they never managed to break down Vienna's defences.

A sixteenth-century European portrait by Hans Eworth, probably of Suliman the Magnificent, illustrates all the severity and majesty of the Ottoman ruling class.



Suliman did not confine himself to land battles, however. With the capture of Constantinople, the Ottomans were able to join in the struggle of the Mediterranean powers for control of the lucrative trade routes to the Orient and he began to make the Ottoman presence felt in earnest, allying with a fleet of pirate admirals to extend his power along the North African coast. After capturing Rhodes in 1522, just a year after his conquest of Belgrade, he was in the ideal position to strike at Spain and southern Italy. But the Ottomans were not really a sea-faring race. They were very much more successful on land and most of their naval victories were won by their pirate allies. Soon after Suliman's death, the Ottoman fleet was decisively beaten at Lepanto in 1571, and although the Ottomans quickly recovered, they never succeeded in upsetting Spain's hold on the Mediterranean; they failed to capture Malta and they were unable to invade Italy.

The year 1529 saw the Ottomans, under Suliman, laying siege to the Austrian capital of Vienna. But their attempt to take the city was successfully foiled.



After Suliman, Europe and the Ottomans reached a state of deadlock. It seemed that the great Turkish movement into Europe had exhausted its impetus and could advance no further. A revival of Turkish aggression in the mid-seventeenth century, with attacks on Crete, on the Habsburgs, and invasions into the Ukraine only served to expose the latent weakness in the Ottoman machine. Not only did a Habsburg army beat the Ottomans at St Gotthard in 1664, but the Turks again found themselves having to withdraw from an attack on Vienna, this time after a 60-day siege in 1683. Eventually, under the pressure of more Austrian victories, the Ottomans were forced to make peace. It was the first time they had admitted defeat and yielded territory. By the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699, Austria gained most of Hungary, and Poland, Russia and Venice all shared in the spoils of the Ottomans' waning power.

Fortunately for the Ottomans, within their empire, relations between Turk and European were far more agreeable. The Ottomans, after all, had to keep in order a huge polyglot empire – in the seventeenth century between 25 and 30 millions – of many diverse races and creeds; and for the most part, the rulers were content to let their subject peoples live as they wished. The Ottoman Empire was an artificial mixture of widely different institutions and cultures. Its capital, Constantinople, which had remained an important centre of communications and administration, thrived on the jostling together of different

communities. After the early ghazi period, non-Moslems were not only allowed to practise their own religion, but were also put to good use within the empire. And, of course, Christian slaves provided the backbone of the army and the administration.

By the end of the seventeenth century, with the Treaty of Karlowitz, it seemed that Europe had, in effect, turned the tables on the Ottomans; by contrast to the preceding centuries it was now Europe who was gaining strength as the Ottomans grew weaker. On the Ottoman side, several factors were making for decline. One trouble was that the limits of expansion seemed to have been reached. The Ottoman armies only campaigned in the spring and summer. Marching from Constantinople, it was as much as they could do to reach Vienna and central Europe, let alone mount a series of drawn-out sieges. Feeding and supplying the vast army over such a distance was a tremendous problem.

Seeds of dissolution

On the other hand, once the empire stopped expanding there were disastrous results. Without the enticement of constant booty and new lands, the sipahis either became restless and discontented, or settled down lazily on what lands they had, which they then wished to pass on to their families. Similarly with the janissaries, prone to revolt if kept idle too long at home in Constantinople. When they began to marry and to take up civilian trades to make up for their lack of booty, their *élite* structure broke down.

Nor was the Ottoman Empire geared to defending or consolidating frontiers it already had. It remained essentially nomadic; it had to keep expanding its frontiers. With the limit reached, it went into decline.

If Suliman had been followed by leaders of similar stature, the decline might have been arrested. But most of his successors were hopelessly incompetent and unfitted for the task. His son, Selim the Sot (1566–74), was a notorious drunkard. In the next century, Ibrahim (1640–8) was deposed after spending most of his time in pursuit of his passions. Even Mehmet IV (1648–87), sultan at a time when his able ministers were staging a comeback, showed little interest in the art of government, indulging instead a mania for hunting. He, too, had to be deposed. Because the sultan was so central a figure in the Ottoman system, these deficient personalities had disastrous effects.

Generally, the Ottoman Empire had failed to advance its ideas. While western Europe was experiencing the ferment of the Renaissance and Reformation, the

Successor to Suliman was the notorious Selim the Sot, an incompetent, dissolute drunkard. His one noteworthy contribution was to initiate the conquest of Cyprus in 1571.



Ottomans stagnated, taking little interest. Even militarily they lost ground, stubbornly clinging on to the unwieldy siege artillery they had once found useful in taking enemy cities. And Ottoman outdated methods in farming and industry provided no basis for an expanding money economy.

Paradoxically, by 1815, as the Ottomans grew weaker and weaker, the European powers saw that the break-up of the Turkish Empire would endanger European peace. What became known as 'the eastern question' arose, with the major powers hovering anxiously over the territories once effectively controlled by the Turks, but now bubbling with discontent.

Russia had a particularly strong interest; by the late eighteenth century it had decisively beaten Turkey in war and established itself on the Black Sea. Like Austria, Russia had a natural concern with obtaining an outlet to the Mediterranean, and its 1774 treaty with Turkey provided it with a special claim to intervene in the Ottoman Empire's internal affairs, on behalf of the Christian minorities.

Sultan Mehmet IV: his mania for hunting frustrated the attempts of his ministers to restore the waning Ottoman power and he was eventually deposed in 1687.



By 1853 Tsar Nicholas was describing Turkey as the 'sick man of Europe', and suggesting ways of partitioning its empire. Conflicts and quarrels were inevitable, particularly between Russia and England. England wished not only to ensure that Russia did not become too powerful, but was anxious to safeguard communications with its own empire in India and the Far East. The direct outcome was the Crimean War, a victory for Britain and France over Russia, and the Congress of Berlin, a settlement imposed on Russia by the other European powers. In the background lay the desire of many groups of non-Moslem Turkish subjects, like the Greeks and Slavs, for their independence, their freedom from the now decadent Ottoman rule. The wretched eastern question was only finally settled with the founding of Kemal Atatürk's new Republic of Turkey in 1923. The Ottomans in Europe were no more.

For nearly six centuries the Ottomans had waged an almost constant war against the Christian West. Over the last two centuries the struggle had been a defensive one, the Ottomans fighting a rearguard action to counter the challenge of the West. The challenge was effectively met only by absorbing it – from the nineteenth century, the Turks began to undergo a successful, if often tortuous, process of westernization. Naval and military schools were re-organized, students sent to European countries, and educational reforms carried through. The old Ottoman system of feudalism was abolished. Western ideas particularly on political matters, received more and more attention.

The incursions of a nomadic empire were over; in its place, and under the impact of the West, rose the modern Turkish state.

Shah Abbas of Persia

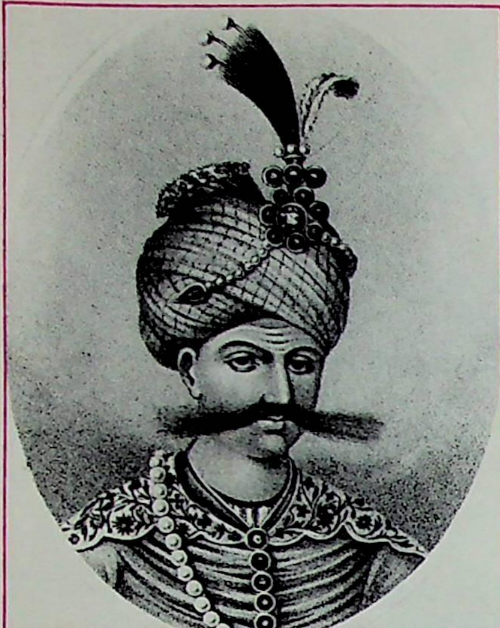
The fame of Shah Abbas rests not only on his military brilliance, but also on his active encouragement of the arts and commerce, his religious tolerance, and on his genius for administration.

SHAH ABBAS THE GREAT was the fourth and most outstanding of the Safavid shahs who ruled Persia from 1500 until the abdication of Shah Sultan Husain in 1722. It was during this period that the foundations of the modern nation-state of Iran were laid down. Shi'ism was made the official religion of Persia and in the long drawn-out struggle with Turkey, which adhered to the orthodox Sunni faith, this religious identification shifted on to the national plane. Out of a sense of religious solidarity there grew a national solidarity. Iranian Central Asia, on account of a firm attachment to Sunnism, which had been the cradle of Perso-Islamic civilization, became finally separated from the rest of the Iranian world, and the territorial boundaries of present-day Iran are essentially those established by the Safavids.

Nor did the existence of Safavid Persia fail to influence the course of events in Europe, where the Ottoman advance was seriously undermined by the conflict with Persia in the east. Furthermore, through the vivid accounts left by travellers like John Chardin and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Safavid Persia played an important part in the growth of the European Enlightenment. Those who sought to show that Europe had no monopoly of truth or perfection frequently cited Persia to prove their point. That Safavid Persia occupies such an important place in history is almost entirely due to the efforts of Shah Abbas the Great (1571–1629), who saved the dynasty from an early death and 'for nearly one hundred years protected his successors from the results of their incompetence'.

The two major problems which faced Shah Abbas on his accession to the throne in 1587 were the restoration of royal authority at home, and the external threat from the Ottomans in the west and the Uzbeks in the east. The first problem was the most pressing, however, for upon it depended Persia's ability to resist her enemies abroad.

The Safavid state had grown out of a fourteenth-century order of dervishes which was originally an orthodox Sunni movement, but later adopted a militant form of the Shi'ah faith. The Shi'ite sects of Islam regarded the leadership of the Moslem community as belonging by



Shah Abbas the Great: he made his country into a great power, and 'for nearly one hundred years protected his successors from the results of their incompetence'.

hereditary right to the descendants of the Prophet Mohammed who continued his divinely inspired mission (the Sunnis believed it was a purely elective affair involving no prophetic role). The Safavids themselves claimed descent from one of the Prophet's descendants, the seventh Shi'ite Imam, Musa Kazim, and through him from the Prophet's daughter Fatima and his son-in-law Ali. Insofar as Islam clearly rejected any separation of the temporal and spiritual powers, all Islamic government was necessarily theocratic.

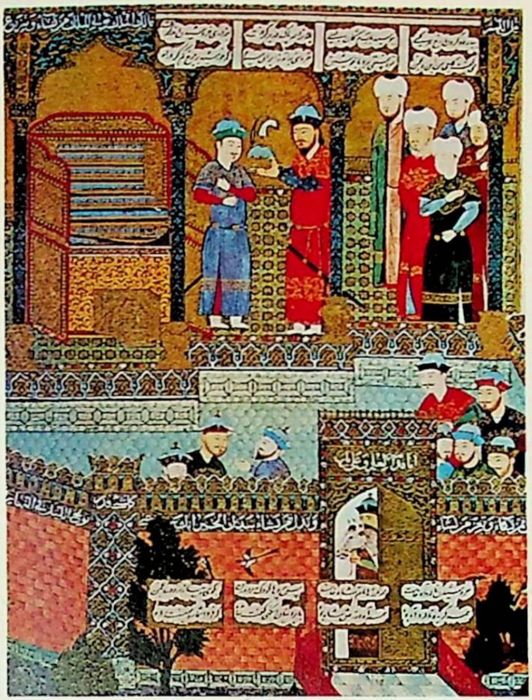
By 1508, the Safavid military organization had conquered western Persia and Iraq, and forced the orthodox Sunni inhabitants into conformity. In 1510, with the victory of Shah Isma'il I over the Uzbeks, Safavid power and prestige seemed assured. Then, at Chaldiran in 1514, Isma'il suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Ottomans, and the blow to Persian morale was serious, since it proved a force led by the shah, although it could defeat the Uzbeks, was no match for the Turks.

The Safavid shah exercised spiritual and temporal power as one who was the leader of a mystical order and who, furthermore, possessed the semi-divine status of a Shi'ite Imam. There was, however, an increasing divergence between the reality and the ideal. Shah Isma'il I's defeat by the Ottomans, followed by the grotesque moral depravity of Shah Isma'il II (Abbas's uncle), threw serious doubt on the Safavid claim to the divine infallibility and sinlessness on which their moral authority rested.

After Chaldiran, the Safavid shahs found it increasingly difficult to assert their authority, particularly with respect to the seven great Turkish tribes of Qizil-bash who represented the effectual basis of Safavid power. By the time Shah Abbas came to the throne the Qizil-bash had abandoned all pretence of respect for the sovereign, reverting almost entirely to their former tribal allegiances. The extreme gravity of the situation was impressed on Abbas during his early years, when he was used as a pawn to serve the factional ends of rival Qizil-bash chiefs. His own succession was, in reality, a *coup d'état* by one of their number, Murshid Quli Kahn Ustajlu, who deposed Abbas's father Mohammad Khudabanda and installed Abbas on the throne as his own protégé.

A new model army

Shah Abbas saw it was imperative to break the power of the Qizil-bash if his own authority was to be restored. One of his first measures, therefore, was to create a strong standing army paid directly from the royal treasury, which replaced the feudal lèvies of the Qizil-bash tribes. This



The coronation of Shah Abbas as a boy of 16. He is shown with his advisors in the top half of the illustration, while below, guests arrive on horseback for the ceremony.

new model army, which ultimately totalled some 37,000 men, was mostly drawn up on the lines suggested by Robert Sherley, an English adventurer with a sound knowledge of military affairs. Thanks to Sherley, among whose attendants was a cannon-founder, Shah Abbas was able to include an artillery corps of 12,000 men armed with 500 cannon. The Safavid army's lack of artillery had proved a serious disadvantage in the fighting against the Ottomans and was largely responsible for the defeat of Chaldiran.

The bulk of the new army consisted of Ghulams or slave troops, many of whom were Georgians who had been converted to Islam. Throughout his reign Shah Abbas showed an increasing tendency to rely on the Ghulams, who eventually filled some 20 per cent of the high administrative posts formerly occupied by the Qizil-bash chiefs.

Like many despots before him, Shah Abbas also adopted a policy of 'divide and rule' in order to prevent the formation of a powerful and united opposition. Large bodies of people were forcibly uprooted and settled in areas far from their original homelands. The settlement of Armenians and Georgians, unfortunate victims of the endless wars with Turkey, was aimed not only at preventing the Turks making use of them, but also at achieving such an

The English adventurer, Sir Robert Sherley, who assisted Shah Abbas in the creation of a new standing army. Sherley later distinguished himself in the war against the Turks.



ethnic and religious diversity that concerted opposition would be made virtually impossible. Nor did Abbas's policy of 'divide and rule' stop here, for in every major city he deliberately stirred up factionalism. Finally, to remove any further internal dangers he introduced the practice of confining the princes of the royal family in the harem, until such time as one of them was called upon to rule.

As with his predecessors, Shah Abbas spent most of his life campaigning. In this he was largely successful, so that for nearly a century following his death Persia remained secure from any serious foreign threat. In 1590, shortly after his accession, Shah Abbas had been forced to conclude an unfavourable peace treaty with the Ottomans, in order to avert the danger of a war on two fronts with the situation at home still unsettled. By its terms the Ottomans retained all their recent conquests in Georgia and Azerbaijan, together with parts of Luristan and Kurdistan. But however disadvantageous, the treaty did enable him to concentrate all his forces against the Uzbeks in the east, whom he heavily defeated at Herat in 1598. He then attempted to consolidate his position on this frontier (as it turned out, unsuccessfully), by installing subservient Uzbek chiefs at Balkh, Marv and Astrabad. When the Uzbeks renewed the attack in 1601 Abbas was badly outmanoeuvred and forced to retreat. With all these attacks it was not until 1604 that he felt free to start military operations against the Ottomans, who at that time were exhausted by internal upheavals and the long war with Austria. His caution paid him well, however, and with his new cannon he won an overwhelming victory near Tabriz in 1606, thereby avenging the humiliation of Chaldiran nearly 100 years earlier.

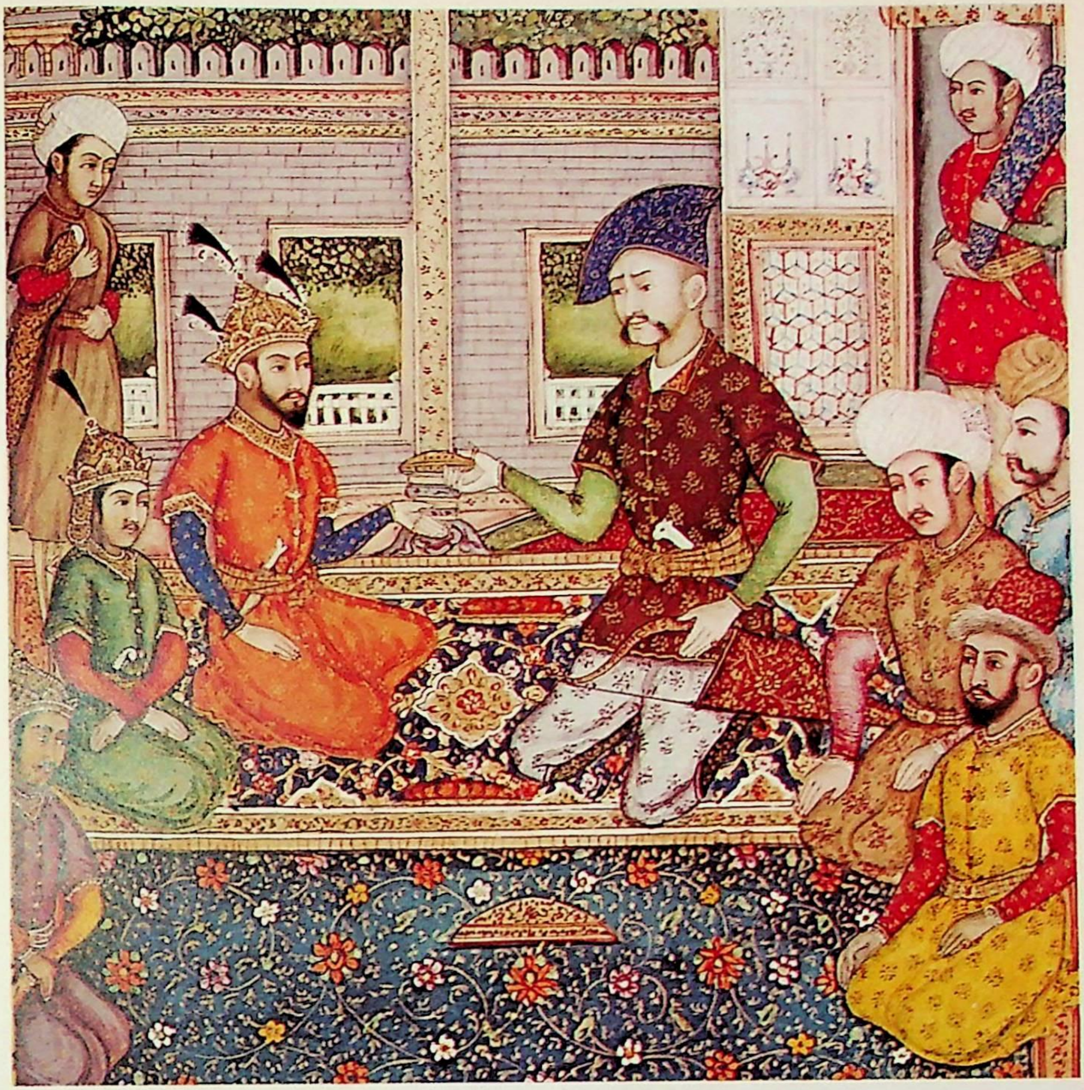
The measure of Shah Abbas's success may be judged by the fact that the Safavid state, which was on the verge of collapse when he took over, enjoyed at least outward power and prosperity for the better part of a century after his death despite the incompetence of subsequent rulers. Yet, however paradoxical it may seem, the seeds of collapse were largely sown during his own lifetime.

A legacy of peace

In the first place, the spiritual bond which had formerly united the shah and his subjects – as well as constituting the moral basis for government – had also provided the Safavid state with a powerful and dynamic ideology. When this broke down, Shah Abbas found no real substitute beyond the assertion of an absolute despot-

A contemporary Persian painting shows Iman Quli, one of Shah Abbas's generals, driving the Portuguese from their base on the island of Hormuz. The English reluctantly co-operated, and in return were granted trading rights at the Shah's new port of Bandar Abbas.



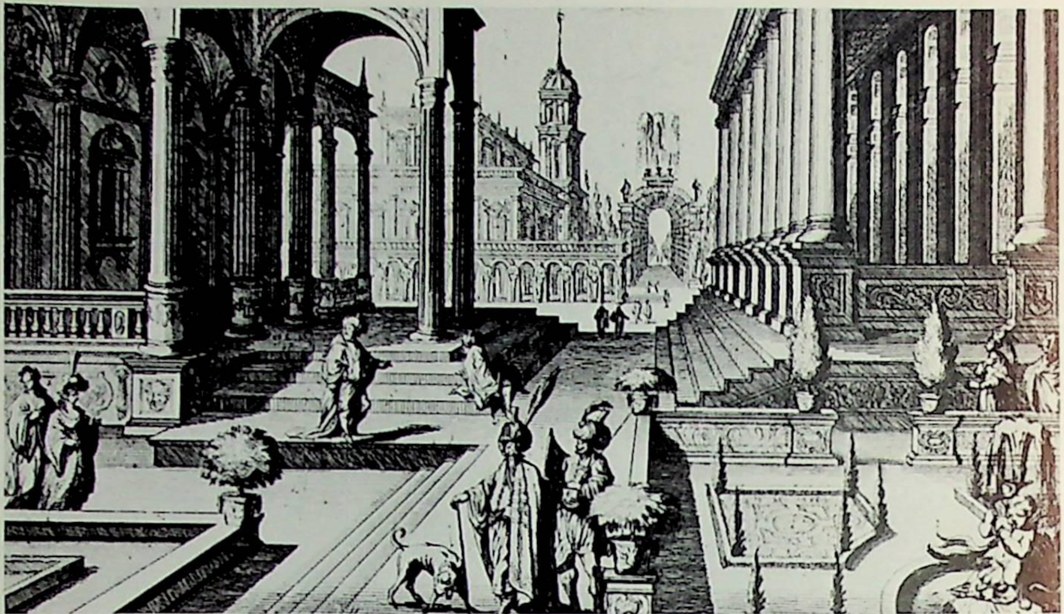


Throughout Abbas's reign, Persia saw a constant stream of visitors from foreign lands, Russians, Spaniards and English amongst them. Here Abbas receives Nazir Mohammed, Khan of Turan.

ism of the traditional kind. The impetus which had brought the Safavids to power was consequently lost for ever.

Secondly, the new standing army imposed a very heavy financial burden on the royal treasury, and this was bound, sooner or later, to lead to extortion and oppression. And finally, the incompetence of subsequent shahs was mainly due to the ruinous practice he had introduced of immuring the royal princes in the harem.

Nevertheless, Shah Abbas's achieve-

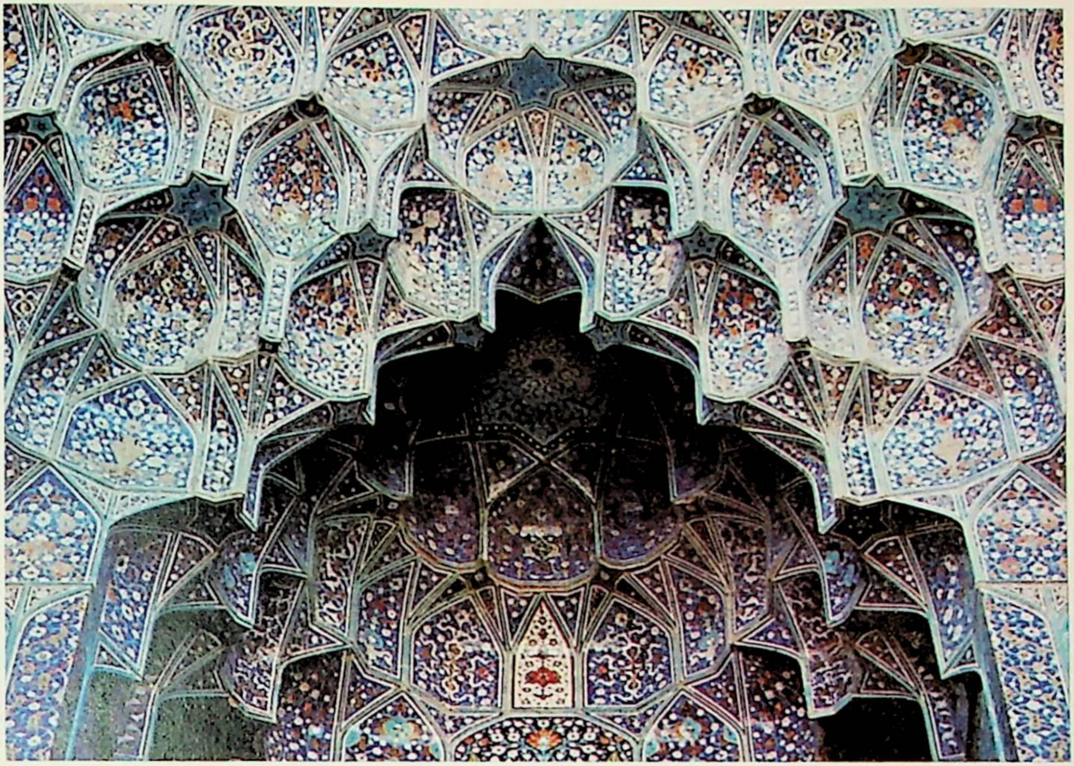


European travellers were constantly amazed by the fabulous luxury of the Persian court. These 'pleasure gardens' were built for the Shah and his courtiers to enjoy the music, fireworks and animal fighting which were favourite entertainments of the period.

ment remains a very real one. With royal authority firmly re-established, Persia was able to enjoy the benefits of prolonged internal peace and security. If the shah was not worshipped, and by many ordinary people he still was, he was at least respected. Similarly the long wars with the Ottomans and the Uzbeks secured Persia from foreign attack for years to come. By immensely improving communications, by importing foreign talent on a large scale, and by encouraging commercial relations with Europe, he enabled trade and commerce to flourish. During the Safavid period literature went into decline, but the patronage which had been denied to the poets for religious reasons was lavished on painters and architects. Shah Abbas transferred his capital to Isfahan, which became the centre of a new artistic flowering. He embellished the city with broad tree-lined avenues, with spacious squares, with mosques and palaces whose colours and proportions have never ceased to arouse admiration and wonder.

The Safavid period came at the same time as the age of discovery and expansion in Europe. It is not surprising, therefore, that there should have been a renewal of contacts with the West. Shah Abbas, insofar as it served his interest, strongly encouraged these contacts. Europeans like Robert Sherley, who had particular skills to offer, were given a ready welcome.

In the same fashion Abbas sought to turn the European presence to his own advantage in the struggle with Ottoman Turkey. Although he failed to secure the military alliance for which he was constantly pressing, he encouraged the growth of a seaborne trade in the Persian Gulf to replace the older trade routes which lay across Ottoman territory. During his reign the Portuguese power in this area was



During the reign of Shah Abbas, art and architecture flourished on an unprecedented scale. One of the most beautiful works he commissioned was the Shah mosque. This is the entrance portal.

broken and the English and Dutch East India Companies became established in its stead. In 1622 Abbas managed to persuade the English to co-operate with his land forces in expelling the Portuguese from their base on the island of Hormuz. In return the English were afterwards granted trading rights at the shah's new port of Bandar Abbas situated on the mainland ten miles northwest of Hormuz. There was also a considerable exchange of embassies between Persia and Europe, and it was at this time that Sir Dodmore Cotton was sent to Persia as the first accredited English ambassador to the Persian court.

Although these contacts presaged a dramatic change in the balance of power between East and West, this was not apparent at the time and the European presence made no lasting impression on Persia. Indeed, the influence was rather the reverse, and the high level of material and cultural prosperity attained by Safavid Persia led many Europeans to regard their own system with doubt and scepticism.

Religious tolerance

From the accounts of the European travellers it is possible to gain an idea of Shah Abbas's appearance and personality. Thomas Herbert, who accompanied Sir Dodmore Cotton's embassy to Persia in 1627, described him as 'of stature low, of a quick aspect, his eyes small and flaming,



An eighteenth-century engraving shows Isfahan, capital of Persia from 1598, with the gate of Shah Abbas. Many of its architectural splendours date from his reign.

without any palpebrae, or hair, over them: he had a low forehead, but a high and hawked nose, sharp chin, and after the mode of Persia was upon the chin beardless; his mustachios were exceeding long and thick, and turned downwards'. Abbas was not only very intelligent and quick-witted, but also remarkably well-informed: he surprised the Italian traveller Pietro Della Valle by correctly interpreting a remark he made as an allusion to the Lutherans. His skill with his hands is well described in the contemporary records of the Carmelite mission. 'He enjoys making scimitars, arquebuses, bridles and saddles for horses, weaving cloth, distilling salts, orange-flower water and medicaments, and – in short – with all mechanical crafts, if not perfect, he is at least somewhat conversant.'

His tolerance in religious matters enabled such monastic orders as the Carmelites, Augustinians and Capuchins to operate freely in Persia. Yet at the same time he was deeply superstitious. His manner of life was simple, yet his informality and accessibility never diminished his dignity. He had a strong sense of humour which, however, he often vented in a macabre fashion at the expense of others. His frequent cruelty was not exceptional for his time, though it is difficult to excuse the vicious way in which he blinded or killed his brothers and his sons.

'But enough, or rather too much,' wrote Thomas Herbert, 'upon such a subject, especially relating to so great and generous a prince, as not withstanding these mistakes is beloved as well as feared at home, and abroad no less highly honoured. Therefore, to record the variety of tortures here too much used by men-eating hags of hell, cannibal-hounds, capigi and their death-twanging bow-strings, ripping up men's guts and the like – what could be the effect but an odious and unnecessary remembrance.'

Father of the Turks

Mustafa Kemal resented the humiliation of his country under its decadent sultans. A war-hero, he seized power and dragged Turkey out of the Middle Ages and into the twentieth century.

BY THE nineteenth century the former glory of Islam had crumbled to political and cultural insignificance. In Turkey the administration was corrupt and incompetent, the people poor and illiterate. Reforms had been attempted at various times but few survived the accession of Abdul Hamid, a sultan with more interest in adding to his harem than in improving the system of government. In 1876 Abdul Hamid responded to the pressure of the western nations, who wished to guarantee the protection of Christian minorities within the empire, by introducing a parliamentary constitution. Little more than a year later he re-established himself as a despotic ruler. A huge regiment of secret agents were kept busy spotting potential troublemakers while Abdul Hamid spent most of his time in the Hildiz Palace, a specially built fortress outside Constantinople.

Network of spies

Abdul Hamid may have exaggerated the dangers but he was intelligent enough to realize that his police and spy network could never entirely remove the threat of rebellion. What he failed to understand was that his own stubborn conservatism encouraged his opponents to rely on violence and revolutionary tactics to win concessions.

The centre for almost all anti-government intrigue was the army. The military was naturally dissatisfied with rulers who had allowed their country to sink to the level where it could be accurately described as 'the sick man of Europe'. In 1896 there was an attempted *coup d'état* planned by a secret society consisting largely of student officers. The ringleaders were captured and exiled to remote parts of the empire. From then on political suspects in uniform were regularly summoned for interrogation. One of the young and ambitious officers who suffered this experience was a recently commissioned captain named Mustafa Kemal. He was known to be openly critical of the sultan and his ministers and to have discussed, in an amateurish way, the need to overthrow the government. After spending several months in prison he was posted to the Fifth Army in Damascus where it was thought he would have few opportunities to dabble in affairs of state. But even in this political backwater he found officers who agreed with his revolutionary ideals, and he soon



The European powers stand idly by while Greek and Turk battle it out in 1897. Traditional enemies, they came near to war in the 1950s when Cyprus was fighting for independence.

established himself as founder and leader of a secret organisation known as *Vatan*, the Fatherland Society. In late 1907 he was posted to Salonika in Macedonia. There Kemal discovered that revolution was much closer than he had ever realized. Radical thinkers, both military and civilian, already exercised considerable power through a secret society which they called the Committee of Union and Progress. Soon after he arrived in Salonika, the Committee came out into the open and threatened to march on Constantinople unless Abdul Hamid restored the constitution of 1876.

The sultan, knowing that he could not rely on his army, accepted the ultimatum. But the political eruption did not end there.

Policy divisions among the rebels led to riots and mutiny. Extremists took control and Abdul Hamid was deposed in favour of his younger brother who had spent the last 30 years of his life in a royal prison. Kemal was jealously critical of his military colleagues who had won power and for a time he concentrated on his duties as an army officer. There was plenty to occupy his mind and his time. He was involved in the fighting in North Africa where Italy was attempting – successfully – to take over the Turkish provinces and he returned home in time for the last stages of the Balkan War in which Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro took advantage of Turkey's internal problems to attack it on the northwestern front. They invaded Macedonia and drove the defenders back to Constantinople. Not surprisingly, these humiliating defeats led to another *coup d'état* at home and a harsh military dictatorship was established. To Kemal, it seemed that very little had changed since the days of Abdul Hamid.

Even now Turkey still had not experienced her full measure of degradation. When the First World War began she blundered into the contest on the side of Germany. Kemal disliked and distrusted the German allies who treated his countrymen as poor relations, but the war gave him his opportunity to prove himself one of Turkey's leading military commanders. By playing a major part in the defeat of the British and Commonwealth forces when they attempted to capture the Dardanelles and invade the mainland, he was able to shrug off his reputation as a staff officer who was too outspoken for the good of his own career, and pose as the war hero with a powerful national following.

By now he had worked out in his own mind the changes which would be necessary to transform Turkey from a medieval autocracy into a modern state. The first priority was to curb the power of Islam. Religion stood for reactionary conservatism and unquestioning obedience to the established rulers. Democracy was impossible until the people were taught to think for themselves. But religion was not the only obstacle to popular sovereignty. With over 80 per cent of the population totally illiterate there was an obvious need for a vast education programme. Emancipation of woman was another urgent reform, for traditional Moslems treated their wives little better than slaves.

Nor were Kemal's ideas for 'westernizing' Turkey restricted to politics and religion. Shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, when he was a military attaché stationed in Bulgaria, he had been taken by a friend, Shakir Sumre, to a gala performance at the opera. 'It was a smart social occasion and the glitter and elegance of the audience made a deep impression on Kemal. . . . This was Western civilization. There was nothing like it in Turkey, Constantinople had barely a theatre, far less an opera house. One of these days his country must enjoy these amenities. His people must be introduced to the graces and refinements of European social life.' (*Atatürk,* Lord Kinross.)

But before any of his ideals could be tested by practical application, Turkey had to survive the greatest war in European history. By 1917, when Mustafa Kemal accompanied the Heir Apparent on a visit to the Kaiser's imperial headquarters, he was convinced that the Germans had lost their gamble. This meant that the humiliation of another defeat for Turkey was unavoidable. Within the year it was certain that all her colonial possessions in the Middle East would fall to the British and Arabs, and Kemal took part in the withdrawal of forces to positions which were generally agreed to mark the frontier of Turkey as a national state. Since most Turkish politicians (including Kemal) were prepared to accept that this was the final



Kemal reviewing his troops during the war of independence against Greece in 1922. His leadership and the nationalists' determination saved Turkey from her neighbour.

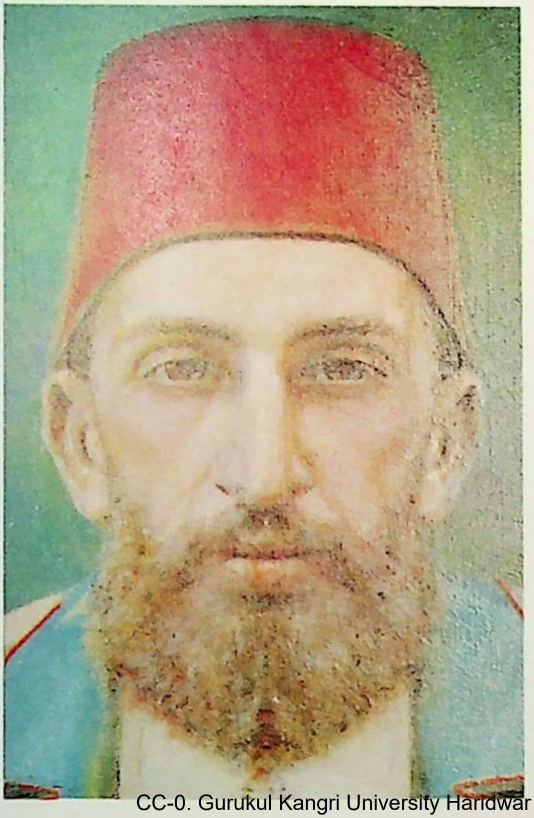
chapter in the history of the Ottoman Empire it seemed only a matter of time before a mutually acceptable agreement could be reached with Britain, France and their European allies. But they reckoned without the territorial ambitions of neighbouring states.

Army of patriots

It soon became clear that Italy and Greece intended to carve up much of Asia Minor, leaving Turkey only a corner of Europe and a little Asiatic kingdom in Anatolia around Angora. It was here that Mustafa Kemal established his headquarters and, taking advantage of his heroic military reputation, gathered an army of patriots who were willing to fight to retain those areas where the Turkish inhabitants were in a majority. His action was in defiance of the sultan's government in Constantinople, but the capital was controlled by occupying forces and he felt free to ignore the demands of a ruler who acted as the mouthpiece for the enemy. He attacked French troops in Cilicia and Italian forces in Konia, inland from Adalia. Italy was an exhausted nation and in no mood to start a new war. She withdrew her troops and gave up her claims to any part of the mainland of Asia Minor. By June 1920, Kemal's army was threatening British troops in the occupation zone on the Asiatic side of the Straits.

At this point the Greeks, with the encouragement of Britain, started a major offensive against Kemal and his nationalists. They had already occupied, and intended to hold, Smyrna. Now they advanced into the interior of Anatolia. Meanwhile the sultan and his government had signed the Treaty of Sèvres, thus disposing of what remained of the empire and accepting Greek gains in Europe and Asia Minor. But the Turks looked to Kemal as their leader and he rejected the terms. The Russians supplied him with arms and the French, impressed by his determination and military skill, abandoned the Treaty of Sèvres and signed a separate

agreement with the nationalists. Only Greece, backed by British finance, maintained her opposition. Kemal launched his greatest assault on the Greeks on 18 August 1922. It was to determine all. The enemy line broke and the proud Greek army streamed back to the coast. Turkish forces entered Smyrna in September; Greek soldiers and peasants who survived the murderous attack found safety in a final retreat across the Aegean Sea. New peace terms were agreed with Britain and the Turks allowed to retain their natural frontiers without further bloodshed.



Abdul Hamid II, deposed by Kemal in 1923. It irked the army – the centre of intrigue – to see the power of the Ottoman Empire frittered away by a succession of indifferent sultans.



Kemal's house at Trabzon. Fond of the good things in life, he drank more than was good for him and indulged in all the trappings of the high-living he associated with the Western world.

The 'real work' begins

In this brief account of the birth pangs of modern Turkey it is easy to underrate the achievements of Kemal and his followers. But when it was all over Turkey's new military dictator was confident enough to say: 'They think that this is the end, that I have reached my goal. But it is only after this that we shall really be able to do something. It is only now, that our real work is beginning.'

Kemal was, in theory, answerable to an elected Assembly but the deputies had neither the strength of character nor the popular support to resist his demands. It was he who decided that the sultan should be deposed, that Turkey should be a republic (with himself as president), and that his cherished reforms should be implemented without delay.

Yet for all his ambitious plans for civilizing his country, this soldier turned poli-



Kemal on a formal occasion. Much impressed with the glittering veneer of Western civilization, he never quite achieved the polish he so desired as a statesman.

tician never acquired the polished image of a Western statesman. He successfully advocated the emancipation of women but when asked what qualities he admired most in a female, he replied, 'availability'! He enjoyed more alcohol than was good for his health, but made no attempt to disguise his vice. When a French journalist wrote that Turkey was governed by one drunkard, one deaf man (the prime minister) and 300 deaf-mutes (the deputies), Kemal commented, 'This man is mistaken. Turkey is governed by one drunkard.'

The people loved or feared him. Even

when he broke the power of Islam the majority adapted their precious traditions to suit his anti-religious policy. Schools were secularized, elementary education was made compulsory, the sacred Arabic script gave way to the Latin alphabet and Islamic law was replaced by the Swiss Civil Code and slightly modified Italian Penal and German Commercial Codes. Kemal was the first Turk to abandon the fez in favour of a hat, symbol of Christianity and racial hatred. To a fanatical people his patronage of a 'civilized' Western dress was an open challenge to the wrath of God.

Women gained equality in law and a marriage status which offered rights as well as responsibilities. In the cities they took to wearing head-scarves instead of veils. They were allowed to vote in municipal elections and encouraged to train for skilled occupations.

The most serious problem was the depressed state of the economy. Turkey was primarily an agricultural country but industrialization was obviously essential if she was to match the progress of her European neighbours. In the early years of his presidency, Kemal refused to risk a foreign loan and relied entirely on domestic resources for his expansionist plans. Turkey was like a small business

Modern Constantinople dominated by the tall minarets of Islam. The Church was a prime target in Kemal's efforts to destroy the old ways and introduce his social reforms.



whose shareholders kept themselves in poverty by ploughing back all their profits for the sake of larger gains in the future. They were still waiting for the economic breakthrough when Kemal died in November 1938, a few weeks after the fifteenth anniversary of the Turkish Republic.

Old colleagues executed

He spent all his energy in the effort to rid his country of its backward looking philosophy. But in his pursuit of social reform he had ruthlessly wiped out the political opposition when the republic was first established and later connived at the execution of many of his old colleagues in a series of treason trials. On the other hand, a short experiment in democratic politics led to chaos. He took comfort in the thought that he was unlike other dictators, that he had freed an enslaved people while a leader like Hitler had enslaved a free people. In 1935 he adopted the name Atatürk, or Father Turk, dropping the Arab name of Mustafa and signing himself Kemal Atatürk. He was indeed the father of the Turks, and his English biographer, Lord Kinross, says of him:

'He . . . transported his country from the Middle Ages to the thresholds of the modern era and a stage beyond. . . . He gave her not merely durable institutions but a national ideal, rooted in patriotism, nourished by a new self-respect, and promising fruitful rewards for new energies. He created, by his deeds and his words, a personal myth, to feed the imagination of a people given to the worship of heroes. He infused them with a belief in the values of western democracy, which they learnt sincerely to respect, differing only as to the means of achievement. All he gave them survives as a living force in the Turk of today.'

This epitaph would no doubt have pleased Kemal Atatürk. It sums up everything he wished for his people.



Students from a military college at the celebration of the republic's thirty-first anniversary. The arch carries the quotation: 'I am entrusting this result to Turkish youth.'

Kemal introducing the new Roman alphabet. The high percentage of illiteracy among his people was a stumbling block to the democracy that he hoped one day to establish.



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